

A final  
arms treaty  
for Reagan?

PAGE 7

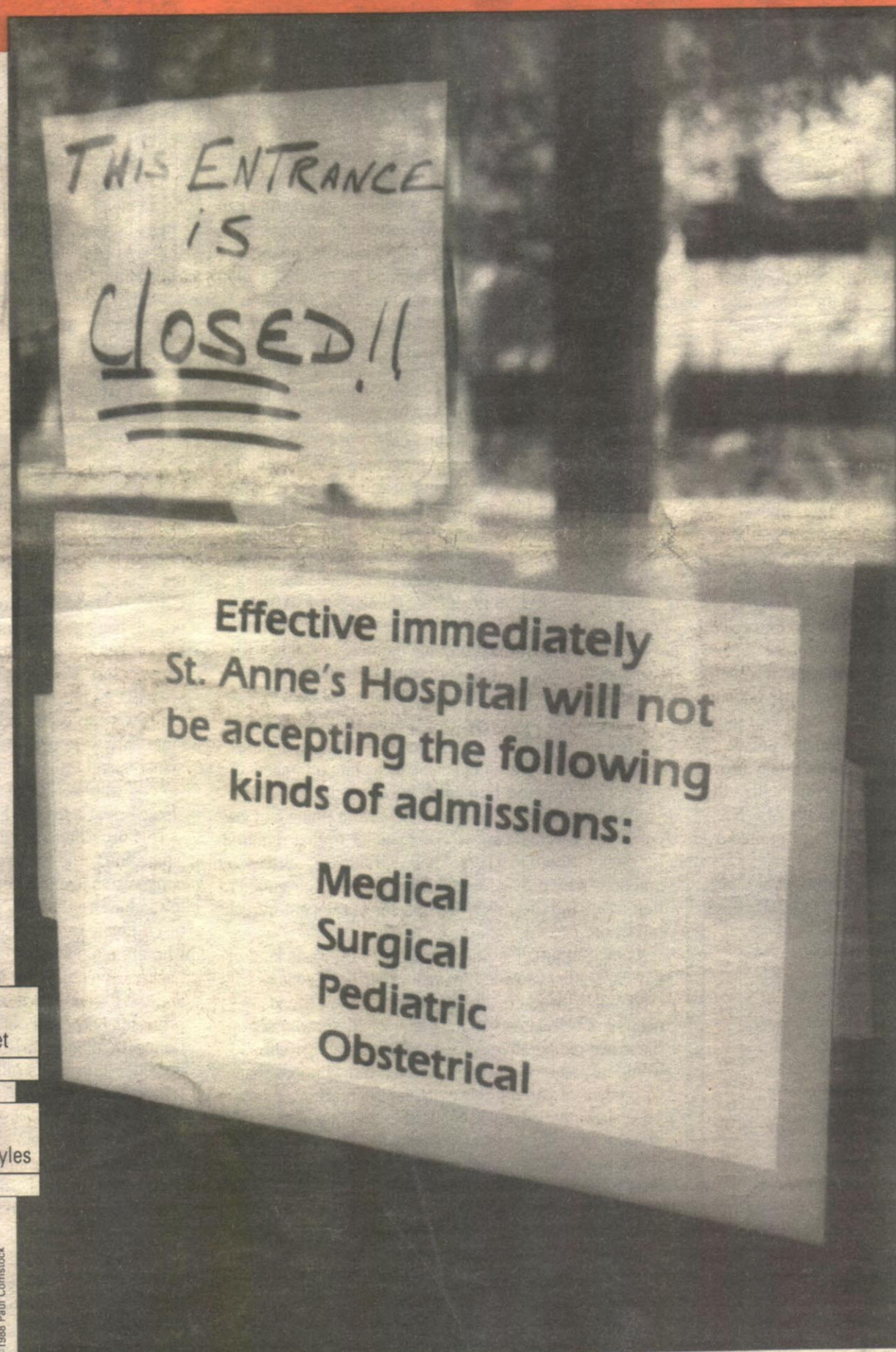
# IN THESE TIMES

VOL. 12, NO. 36

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## HEALTH SCARE



**Just say "no"**

Chileans vote on Pinochet

PAGE 12

**Eight Men Out**

Power hitting with John Sayles

PAGE 21

St. Anne's, on Chicago's  
west side, shut its doors last  
month.

**INNER-CITY HOSPITALS IN CRISIS**

PAGE 3





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## Democrats struggle with their ABCs

By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON, D.C.

This year's liberal *cause célèbre* is the ABC (Act for Better Child Care) Bill. The bill, with 160 sponsors in the House of Representatives and 34 in the Senate, is being touted as the Democratic response to the conservative agenda on the family. Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis supports it, and Republican George Bush, who has offered an alternative of his own, opposes it. It will be an important issue in the presidential debates.

But this seemingly useful bill, which is intended to fund child care for working mothers and to improve the quality of child care, could founder on familiar political rocks. Like past efforts at liberal social policy, the ABC bill attempts to achieve desirable goals by imposing federal authority and federally decreed standards on what historically has been a local and even private concern. It institutionalizes—even nationalizes—child care.

Bush's \$1.9 billion alternative provides tax credits for low-income parents with children under age four regardless of whether they purchase child care or not. Bush's bill is typically penurious. According to estimates by the Children's Defense Fund, the \$1,000 granted to a family earning \$10,000 a year would buy only about four months of child care in most cities. But whatever the dollar amounts involved, Bush's minimal approach may prove more philosophically acceptable to Americans than the "big government" approach embodied in the ABC bill.

**Funding bureaucracy:** The ABC bill was drafted over

two years by a coalition of more than 100 groups drawn together by the widely respected Children's Defense Fund. It is based on two incontestable assumptions: as the percentage of working mothers has grown, the number of children needing child care "has increased dramatically over the last decade," and as demand has risen the supply "of quality child care arrangements falls far short."

Unlike Bush's bill, ABC does not provide any money directly to parents that they can use at their own discretion. Instead, ABC dispenses all \$2.5 billion to the federal government and the states. One-quarter of the funds would pay for the program's administrative costs and for such ancillary services as child-care referral and training. Parents would qualify for the remaining \$1.875 billion only if they register their children with child-care centers licensed by the state. Parents would either receive vouchers or scholarships from these licensed institutions.

National licensing guidelines would be set by a new National Adviser Committee on Child Care Standards, appointed by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. But each state could supplement them with its own guidelines. Federal standards would regulate the ratio of child-care workers to children, child-care worker training and credentialing, and the health and safety concerns of each center.

The ABC bill would spend a quarter of its funds on a myriad of committees and boards ranging from a state advisory committee on licensing to a state interagency advisory committee. It mandates "clearinghouses" and "support networks." It sets up extensive training and credentialing for child-care workers similar to that required for public school teachers. These various committees and functions may provide useful services, but their enumeration in the bill has raised the specter of rampant bureaucratization.

Its biggest pitfall is that it subsidizes only one kind of day care—that provided by institutionalized centers with credentialed workers. Parents who pay their friends, neighbors or relatives to look after children, who set up their own cooperatives or who rely on grandparents would not receive any subsidy, even though more than 65 percent of parents presently use such arrangements.

Conservative critics have also legitimately argued that the ABC bill also discriminates against mothers who choose to stay home and raise their children. The bill does provide an incentive for parents to send their children to an authorized child-care center rather than take care of them at home. Of course, many conservatives regard child care as an abomination, but one need not take that position to reject a bill that implicitly endorses one type of child care over another.

**Extensive regulations:** ABC proponents contend that federally regulated child care is needed to redress the woeful condition of many child-care programs. According to Amy Wilkins of the Children's Defense Fund, in Arkansas one child-care provider can legally take care of 16 children at one time. Nine states have no regulation at all governing the number of children one worker can supervise or protecting the children's health and safety.

Wilkins has a point. State and local governments have to set adequate standards for child-care institutions that look after dozens of children. But ABC would penalize parents who want to send their children to a friend or neighbor's house. The bill would garner more widespread support if it provided a direct subsidy to lower-income parents of young children and then addressed separately the question of licensing child-care institutions. ABC's insistence on merging the two functions could be construed as paternalistic, as though the ABC proponents want not only to license these institutions, but to force parents to enroll in them.

There is another problem. Although some states have overly lax regulations, other states, once ABC was adopted, might institute rigid regulations that dampen the supply of institutionalized day care. In Maryland the state Democratic government has been trying to draw up new child-care regulations. Last April an ad hoc committee organized by the Interagency Child Care Council and Department of Human Resources weighed in with 114 pages of recommended regulations.

They are so sweeping that even the most highly touted preschools would have trouble complying with the regulations. For instance, during naps only "five footcandles" of artificial lighting should be present. In the playground each child should occupy "not less than 75 square feet for 50 percent of the licensed capacity." And there should be no sign of "grass, trees or shrubs that need care."

Of course, the ABC bill would not necessarily encourage this kind of regulation, but the bill nevertheless encourages authoritarian intrusiveness. The bill invites social scientists, policy junkies and lobbyists to impose elabo-

## INSIDE STORY

rate guidelines on working parents and child-care workers.

**Church-state relations:** The danger in the bill's approach has already become apparent in the dispute that has broken out over church-state relations. Many child-care centers are run by or housed in churches or synagogues; but in the bill's original wording no ABC funds were to go to "sectarian purposes and activities." If child care were performed in church facilities, all religious symbols and artifacts had to be "covered" or "removed." No one who worked at a religiously funded school could also work at a licensed child-care center.

This provision brought complaints from religious organizations. The Children's Defense Fund and the bill's congressional supporters drafted a compromise that allows churches to be licensed for child care if they do not discriminate on religious grounds among the children who are publicly funded. But several of the bill's major backers, including the National Education Association and the Parent-Teachers Association, rejected the compromise and pulled out of the ABC's coalition in protest. Connecticut Sen. Christopher Dodd is now proposing that consideration of the bill be put off until next year when tempers cool.

Other provisions raise the same type of questions. For instance, licensed child-care centers are required to include "a reasonable mix of children from different socioeconomic backgrounds." Does this mean that neighborhood centers will be subject to anti-discrimination law suits? Will someone propose busing between child-care centers?

With the ABC bill, the Democrats are treading along a familiar path. If the Protestant evangelicals dream of little revival tents spreading across the land, and if the Catholics seek to parochialize education and morals, the liberal Democrats dream of committees and credentials, networks and clearinghouses, and of a society in which differences of religion, race, background and intelligence disappear with the wave of a wand. Americans are a diverse people and want to be able to choose their own dreams, even if they turn out to be nightmares. □

## CONTENTS

Inside Story: The Dems' child-care prescription .....	2
Health scare—the inner-city hospital crisis .....	3
In Short .....	4
Voter registration—are the Democrats blowing it? .....	6
Will Reagan pull off an arms treaty? .....	7
Yonkers—nine ways to destroy a city .....	8
Nicaragua—conversations with the contras .....	9
Peru's Shining Path .....	11
Will Chileans just say "no" to Pinochet? .....	12
Editorials .....	14
Letters/Sylvia .....	15
Viewpoints: Poverty re-examined .....	16
The lowdown on low-intensity conflict .....	17
In Print: Vietnam succumbs to the Washington Syndrome .....	18
New Lefties who veered right .....	19
In the Arts: Jazz divas Carmen McRae and Betty Carter .....	20
Seattle's 1919 general strike rocks again .....	20
John Sayles swings for the fences in <i>Eight Men Out</i> .....	21
Classifieds/Life in Hell .....	22
Letterman, Pekar and the fate of <i>Late Night</i> .....	24

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By Salim Muwakkil

## Inner-city health care: a terminally ill system?

**T**HE ECONOMIC POLARIZATION THAT HISTORY will label as the Reagan era's defining motif is nowhere more glaring than in the country's two-tier system of health-care delivery. Those with the economic resources generally have prompt access to good medical care. Less affluent segments of the population have not fared nearly as well, however, and a rash of inner-city hospital closings has focussed attention on the health-care system's stark inequities.

A record 79 hospitals closed last year, and more than half of those were in inner-city neighborhoods. This alarming trend leaves communities that were already without adequate medical services in a virtual health-care emergency.

In Chicago, for example, 10 hospitals have closed since 1984. The largest—St. Anne's Hospital, an 85-year-old, 347-bed facility that served a predominantly minority population on the city's west side—closed just last month, prompting a brief spasm of civic soul-searching. Similar stories come out of Texas, where 11 hospitals closed this year alone. In Los Angeles, seven medical centers serving primarily the medically indigent and uninsured have shut their doors in recent years.

**Anti-poor bias:** The situation is echoed in cities as diverse as Montgomery and New York, New Orleans and Baltimore. It's a national problem with many contributing causes. Changing demographics, an inefficient system of government funding, rising medical costs, competition for state-of-the-art medical technology all play a part in the growing crisis. But many observers contend the overarching reason may be something in the national mood: the "economic Darwinism" of Reaganomics and the resurgent racism of recent years have nourished an anti-poor bias that prevents any meaningful attempt to ease the problem.

"We have a health system that is casting off precious community resources on the basis of financial instability," said Dr. Quentin Young in reaction to the closing of St. Anne's Hospital. Young, who is president of the Health and Medicine Policy Research Group—a Chicago-based organization concerned with increasing the poor's access to medical care—called the closing a "social and civic tragedy." Almost invariably, he added, "the hospitals that go under are those serving the already underserved."

The ills that felled St. Anne's are the same ones that proved fatal to other inner-city hospitals and that endanger them all. The huge edifice, Illinois' largest hospital, was located in a low-income neighborhood with a large number of minority patients either uninsured or dependent on Medicaid and Medicare. However, those two programs paid only a portion of medical costs and the payments were never prompt. The facility provided uninsured patients with free, uncompensated medical care.

Some hospitals are able to weather those storms by transferring the costs to patients with private insurance, but few St. Anne's patients fit that category. Meanwhile, those government-dependent patients who were once served by St. Anne's now will shift the burden to other hospitals, endangering those facilities. While it's clear that inner-city hospitals will continue to fail unless some effort is made to restructure this country's system

of health-care delivery, there are relatively few voices urging such changes.

"Illinois legislators knew we were going to have an inner-city health-care crisis, but they still let it happen," said State Sen. Miguel del Valle (D-Chicago), whose district includes St. Anne's. "It's difficult for me to understand how lawmakers can be so insensitive to the acute suffering caused by the lack of access to health care. My district has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the country, gang activity is rampant and deadly, and we have a large percentage of working poor who are underinsured and uninsured," he added. "Where do these people go now?"

It's a good question. According to most estimates, more than 40 million people in this country lack any type of medical insurance, and many of them are the so-called working poor. What's more, census data shows that in 1985 only about 40 percent of the nation's poor were covered by Medicaid, the federal-state program designed to provide health care for the medically indigent. "We have a medical underclass in this country that is falling further and further behind," said Dr. Allan Helprin of the California Medical Center in Los Angeles.

In most low-income communities, the emergency room is the primary health-care provider. A study by the Washington, D.C., Hospital Association found that 80 percent of the admissions in its hospitals are through the emergency rooms, and most experts cite similar figures for other inner-city institutions. "When we lose an emergency room we really feel it," said del Valle.

**Black hospitals:** "I don't know why people are surprised that inner-city hospitals are failing at such a rapid rate," said Dr. Mitchell Rice, a Louisiana State University professor of public administration and an expert on issues of health care in the black community. "There's been a systematic disinvestment in housing, education, commercial activity and most other aspects of life in those communities. Why should there be such shock at a similar development in health-care delivery?"

Rice, who co-authored the 1987 book *Health Care Issues in Black America*, has a particular interest in the fate of traditionally black hospitals. "There are only a few such institutions left in the country," he said. "The deterioration of those facilities presaged the current crisis of public hospitals." Rice said

the loss of black hospitals means more to black communities than the loss of health-care access.

Racism is an important factor in the inner-city health-care crisis, he said, and the loss of the medical resources that once were provided by traditionally black hospitals weakens the black community's ability to fight back. "Remember," Rice noted, "only about 2.5 percent of the physicians in this country are black. And while the percentage of other health-care professionals who are black is somewhat higher, the figures are dismally low. Black hospitals once served as fertile training grounds and recruitment centers for a whole range of health-care professionals. And they were also major employers."

Chicago's Provident Hospital, the oldest and perhaps best known of the country's traditionally black hospitals (it was the site of the first open-heart surgery operation) closed last year after a long struggle to maintain economic viability. Despite the institution's distinguished history, as well as valiant efforts by community leaders and health-care organizers to rescue it, Provident joined Andrews Hospital in Montgomery, Ala., and Baltimore's Provident Hospital in closing last year. "And those without institutional support, like a university, are sure to follow," Rich said.

Although blacks suffer disproportionately both from lack of access to health services and from the major diseases of the late 20th century, neither black elected officials nor civil rights leaders have addressed those issues with any degree of consistency. However, the accelerated pace of inner-city hospital closings has triggered a strong reaction that may lead to a wider consideration of health care in the black community.

"We're beginning to see more black leaders talking about health issues," Rice said. "The problem you have is that community health is a nebulous concept. It's not as tangible as issues like voting, housing and education, and therefore it's more difficult for the public to grasp. But in many ways it's more important." The high visibility accorded hospital closings tends to dramatize the issue and offer an opportunity for black leadership to sharpen its focus on the importance of health care access.

**Health brain trust:** As the crisis of inner-city health care mounts, many state legislatures remain reluctant to increase Medicaid payment for the poor, or even to streamline the process. State legislators across the nation are adamantly refusing health-care advocates' urgings for more tax dollars to rescue ailing inner-city institutions.

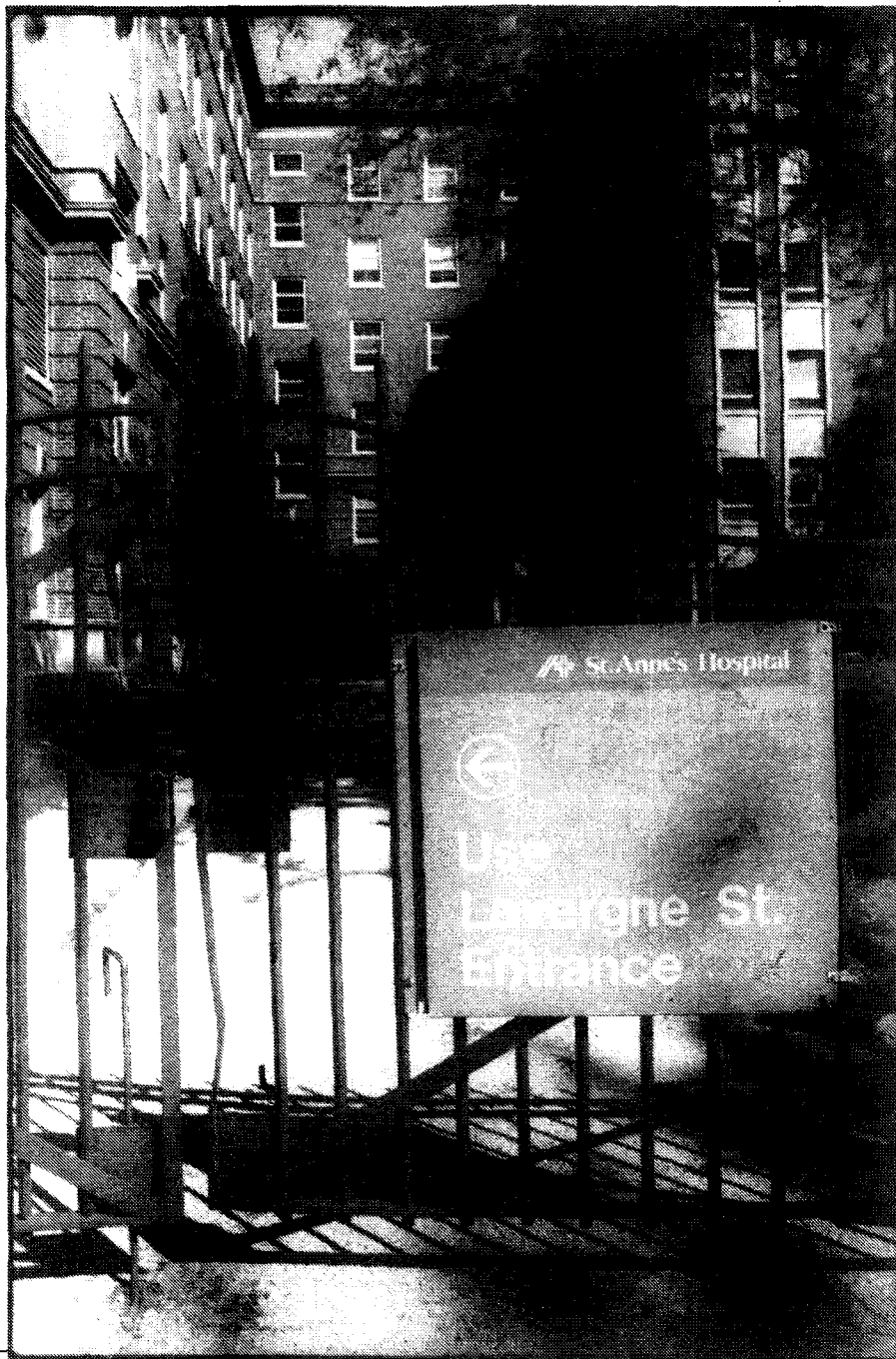
And on the federal level, Congress seems to be no more favorably disposed. The current session of Congress has placed further cuts on Social Security's Medicare system—in continued attempts to slow the rise in medical costs—although it has passed legislation authorizing catastrophic health-care insurance.

Caught off guard by the hospital closings crisis, the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) has begun addressing the issue through an unofficial group called the "Health Brain Trust." Chaired by Rep. Louis Stokes (D-OH), the group initially is attempting to gauge the dimensions of the problem.

"There's been no nationwide attempt to gather information relevant to the inner-city health crisis before now," explained Stokes

*Continued on page 22*

IN THESE TIMES SEPT. 21-27, 1988 3



St. Anne's Hospital on Chicago's west side closed its doors last month.



By Maggie Garb

## Wage war over that chasm

Former Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Chair Eleanor Holmes Norton called it "the issue of the '80s." But so far the wage gap between men and women remains a virtual chasm. The National Committee on Pay Equity (NCPE) reports that women in the U.S. earn only 64.3 percent of the amount men make, about a 5 percent increase in 15 years. For minority women the gap is even greater. Black women are paid 57 cents for every dollar paid to white men and Hispanic women only 53 cents. Minority men do slightly better. Black men are paid 71 cents and Hispanic men 65 cents for every dollar paid to white men. NCPE executive director Claudia Wayne says overt discrimination accounts for about one-third of the wage disparity. In addition, she says the historic concentration of women and minorities in low-paying jobs aggravates wage gaps. In 1986 women constituted 99 percent of clerical workers, 97 percent of child-care workers and 91 percent of data-entry operators. Minority women are further segregated in the lowest paying jobs. For black women the most widely held occupations are as private household workers, cooks, housekeepers and welfare aides. The NCPE is launching a new election-year public-awareness campaign called "Pay Equity—Justice you can bank on." For more information write the NCPE at 1201 16th St. NW, Suite 420, Washington, DC 20036.

## Sell first, safety second

A U.S. District Court jury last week awarded a Minnesota woman \$9 million in damages from G.D. Searle & Co., maker of the Copper-7 IUD. The case was the first Copper-7-related lawsuit to include about 150 internal documents subpoenaed from Searle. It was also the first big jury award for a woman injured by the Copper-7. Lawyers for the plaintiff say they spent about 18 months going through company memos, reports on Copper-7 tests and other related information. The documents revealed an internal debate among high-level executives and researchers over the safety and effectiveness of the Copper-7. This debate began before the device hit the market in 1974 and continued through January 1986 when Searle voluntarily removed it from the U.S. market. At that time it was worn by an estimated 9 million American women. But by the mid-'80s doctors began reporting a high frequency of pelvic inflammatory disease among women wearing the Copper-7, particularly among women who had never given birth to children. This was in direct contradiction to Searle's national marketing campaign, which claims the device was safe for nulliparous women. When it pulled the Copper-7 off the U.S. market, Searle blamed the escalating cost of defending product liability lawsuits. By Searle's tally, about 1,300 Copper-7 lawsuits have been filed. More than two-thirds have been dismissed or settled. Of the 18 cases that have been decided in court, Searle has won 15, plaintiffs have now won three. The lawyers for the Minnesota plaintiff say this case will likely pave the way for hundreds of new lawsuits and jury awards for women left infertile after wearing the Copper-7.

## The Third World is the last to know

Meanwhile, Searle continues marketing and distributing the Copper-7 IUD in 18 countries overseas. A Searle spokesman refused to comment on Copper-7 sales, but if Searle is anything like the A.H. Robins Co., Third World women will likely suffer from diseases related to the Copper-7 for years to come. A.H. Robins was the manufacturer of the Dalkon Shield. Despite tests linking the Dalkon Shield to pelvic inflammatory disease, Robins reportedly continued distributing the device in Latin America until the late '70s (see *In These Times*, May 11). Martina Langley, a Texas-based lawyer and former health-care worker, has been travelling in Latin America for the past 12 years, trying to alert women and health-care workers to the dangers of the Dalkon Shield. She reports a great victory this summer with the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) putting up Dalkon Shield warning posters in all clinics in Guatemala. Langley says she's pleased with the posters, "but what about the rest of the Third World women? What can we do for them?"



**The 1988 Pledge Drive:** The Pledge of Allegiance is no longer the exclusive property of presidential candidates and school children—Congress has now unfurled the flag. House speaker Jim Wright, fearing that the Democrats would be swamped by the George Bush-inspired Pledge of Allegiance hysteria, announced last week that all remaining House sessions of the 100th Congress would open with the Pledge of Allegiance. Conservative Democrat Sonny Montgomery of Mississippi, led the first official recital on September 13. The following day the ultra-conservative Floyd Spence (R-SC) did the honors. A spokesman for House speaker Wright insisted that this decision did not in any way play into George Bush's plan to turn the pledge flap into a major distraction.

## Spirit of Atlanta escapes New Haven

NEW HAVEN, CONN.—Nationally, Jesse Jackson Democrats and party insiders have maintained a fragile peace. No such luck in New Haven.

Here a bruising intraparty battle ended last week, all the more divisive because it was over a normally insignificant position that hasn't been contested since at least the days of Reconstruction: the Democratic Party registrar of voters.

Since as far back as the 1860s, whenever a registrar retired the city's Democrats have handed the position to the deputy registrar. But not this time. For the first time the next in line was a black person. A black woman yet. The deputy registrar is a loyal, lifelong Democrat named Althea Tyson.

But the party machine by-passed Tyson and instead nominated a white woman, Sharon Ferrucci. Although the party machine claims Ferrucci won the ward committees' nomination process fair and square, a coalition of black activists, mainstream black politicians, peace activists and union members believes racism by the party establishment was involved.

This grass-roots coalition, which captured the city for Jesse Jackson in last spring's presidential primary, came out in force for Tyson. The party machine, with the help of white liberal officeholders—pulled out all

the stops for Ferrucci. And last Wednesday Ferrucci prevailed by a mere 800 votes, a shockingly slim margin that both camps believe will have significant impact on the future of black politics in New Haven.

The campaign was the political issue of the summer in New Haven. It featured charges by the Tyson camp of harassment and racial threats against the candidate. At the city party's annual convention a week after the national convention in Atlanta, white Democrats saw their worst nightmare come true: black Democrats walked out of the hall charging that white leaders had shut them out of power. The blacks left behind a badly splintered party. Black Democrats viewed their protest as part of a larger struggle for empowerment, an outgrowth of the civil rights movement.

Such a situation would have seemed highly unlikely just months ago in New Haven. But Jesse Jackson's presidential campaign changed all that.

The white-dominated New Haven Democratic Party machine backed Michael Dukakis in the Connecticut primary. But, thanks largely to the organizing of young black activists and the rank-and-file of several local unions, Jackson captured the city. The city's more established black political leaders, in the past basically compliant with the patronage approach of the one-party city's Democratic machine, served as the heads

of the Jackson campaign. Inner-city communities, organized and energized by the campaign and armed with rising expectations, confronted their leaders about being dealt out of New Haven's incessant gentrification. Talk began about electing a black mayor in 1989. And the party establishment was put on notice of black electoral challenges.

"What is this new Democratic Party [that came out of Atlanta] supposed to be like?" Evan Stark, a Tyson supporter, asked the crowd at the July 28 city Democratic convention. "Is 'unity' a real sharing of power? Party unity no longer means that people on the outside have to accept what is offered them."

Like Jesse Jackson, Althea Tyson (recently supporters have made a point of stressing her full name: Althea Jackson Tyson) wants a place at the table. She believes she earned the registrar's job and that it would have been hers if she were white, no questions asked. Like Jackson, she has made the enfranchisement of the poor a major campaign plank.

Rather than seeking an accommodation, party leaders have thrown down the gauntlet to New Haven's Jackson coalition. "I hope," observes Tyson supporter Bill Dyson, a state representative, "that it doesn't take five or 10 years for the wounds to heal. One does not win an [general] election by trying to get just one section of the vote."

—Paul Bass



## Salinas named Mexico's next president

MEXICO CITY—Mexico's ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) majority in Mexico's 500-seat Chamber of Deputies has railroaded through the Electoral College the ratification of PRI candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari as Mexico's next president. The vote was 263-85, with 152 abstentions.

The Chamber's Electoral College opened the ratification process one week after a stormy protest by opposition legislators of the National Democratic Front-Mexican Socialist Party (FDN-PMS) coalition and the conservative National Action Party (PAN). The protest over alleged PRI vote fraud came during the annual September state of the nation address by outgoing President Miguel de la Madrid. PAN deputies held aloft ballots allegedly used in vote fraud and FDN-PMS legislators repeatedly interrupted de la Madrid before walking out in protest in the final moments of the presidential address.

In the early morning hours of September 9, the PRI tried to bring up a motion in the Electoral College to ratify Salinas as Mexico's next president. But the attempt ran into a brick wall of opposition when fist fights broke out between PRI and FDN-PMS deputies and the opposition stormed the podium. When it



became apparent on September 10 that sooner or later the PRI would use its majority to ratify Salinas at whatever cost, the FDN-PMS deputies again staged a walkout along with 16 PAN deputies, leaving 85 PANistas to vote against the PRI.

The PRI's determination to ratify Salinas by simple majority rather than consensus has not dispelled the doubts about the results of the July 6 presidential election raised by the

opposition parties and their presidential candidates Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas (FDN-PMS) and Manuel Clouthier (PAN).

When Salinas takes office December 1, he will enter his six-year term without a clear mandate from the electorate and with lingering questions about the democratic legitimacy of his presidency.

—Mike Tangeman

## Illinois passes "secret AIDS testing" law

Illinois became the first state to legislate "secret AIDS testing" September 2 when Gov. James Thompson signed legislation that repealed Illinois' "written, informed consent" requirement for administration of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) antibody test. Illinois doctors may now legally run an HIV antibody test on a patient without the patient's knowledge.

The new testing law overturns crucial portions of Illinois' AIDS Confidentiality Act, which had been considered a model piece of legislation on issues of HIV antibody testing. The measure also "raises very serious constitutional, federal and state law questions," according to Harvey Grossman, legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois. "We're definitely planning legal challenges," he said. "We're looking for clients right now."

In signing the measure, Gov. Thompson said he was forced to weigh individual rights against protection of the health of the community at large. He also said health-care providers would do a better job if they could be assured of a "safe work environment."

The "secret AIDS testing" measure was loudly opposed by the director of the Illinois Department of Public Health, Bernard Turnock, the direc-



Illinois Gov. James Thompson

tor of the Chicago Health Department, Lonnie Edwards, and by all gay and AIDS organizations in the state. All argued that the serious implications of HIV antibody testing necessitate thorough pre- and post-test counseling, as well as the option of anonymity.

The main proponent of the legislation was the Illinois State Medical Society (ISMS), which in addition to its aggressive lobbying has contributed \$115,000 to Thompson's cam-

paign chest since mid-1985. It also contributed \$415,000 to the campaigns of Illinois' legislators in the most recent 12-month reporting period, according to disclosures filed with the state Board of Elections. "ISMS is the largest lobbyist in Illinois," said Illinois Gay and Lesbian Task Force (IGLTF) member Tim Drake. "They normally get what they want."

The secret testing measure emerged in the final two days of Illinois' most recent legislative session when conservative legislator and Presidential HIV Commission member Penny Pullen added an amendment onto other legislation. Two months later Thompson signed the legislation.

Members of IGLTF are charging that Thompson has been "blatantly bribed," and have declared September 26 "Who Owns Jim Thompson Day." The group has drafted a written contract for patients to have their physicians sign that would prohibit doctors from administering any test without written, informed consent. If doctors won't sign the contract, IGLTF leaders will advise individuals to seek out-of-state treatment.

Illinois' new one-of-a-kind "secret AIDS testing" law joins Illinois' one-of-a-kind mandatory premarital HIV antibody testing law. Louisiana, the only other state that ever required premarital testing, repealed its law earlier this year.

—Rex Wockner

## Following in Bozo's footsteps

Following the Republican National Convention in New Orleans last month, Rep. William H. Gray III (D-PA) released two reports analyzing the performance of President Reagan and Vice President George Bush. Gray, chair of the House Budget Committee, pulled apart the Republicans' claims about the economy, federal budget and taxes, as well as defense and domestic spending. In his speech at the convention, Reagan "made at least 20 factual errors, misstatements or misrepresentations," according to Gray. It appears Bush is ready to follow in his leader's footsteps. Gray says Bush's acceptance speech also "contained numerous misstatements and omissions." As just one example of Bush's confusion, Gray cites the Bush claim that the Reagan administration created 17 million jobs "the majority of them paid an average...of more than \$22,000 a year." Gray says not even the administration's Bureau of Labor Statistics will defend that claim. In the eight years of the Reagan administration about 15.8 million new jobs were created, a pace slower than the job-creation rate under the Carter administration, Gray says. More than half of the new jobs of the past eight years are lower-paying service industry jobs.

## No kidding

Another study finds Reagan administration programs unable to lift poor families out of poverty. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, an independent research group, says the effectiveness of government programs on the poor declined in 1987 for the sixth time in eight years. In an analysis of statistics released by the Census Bureau last month, the center says that reductions in federal and state programs are "a major cause of the increase in family poverty rates since the late '70s." Despite the Reagan administration's claims of economic growth, the Census Bureau reports that 32.5 million Americans lived under the government's official poverty line in 1987, 8 million more than in 1978. The Center's report says that if the government's programs had the same anti-poverty impact in 1987 as they had in 1979, 517,000 fewer families would be living in poverty.

## Quayle calls for bondage

At a GOP rally in Springfield, Ill., last week Republican vice presidential nominee Sen. J. Danforth Quayle said the Republicans "understand the importance of having the bondage between the parent and child...." Quayle has gained a lot from his family connections, and presumably he understands that bondage better than most.

## Bush blitzkrieg in the war of words

Dan Quayle proved a bit lily-livered when it came to facing an enemy like the Viet Cong, but when it comes to attacking the press he and the rest of the Bush campaign deserve medals. When the ill-equipped media corps—armed only with Quayle's questionable history—launched a mild offensive against the Indiana senator in August, the Bush forces launched a fierce counterattack. "We can't have Gestapo tactics in the media," shouted Bush aide Roger Ailes, leading the charge. It was only later that America learned how the Bush campaign knew so much about the Gestapo. This month six members of Bush's campaign committee on ethics resigned amid charges they were anti-Semitic or linked to pro-Nazi groups or activities.

## Quayle stinks up the joint

A key battle in the war of words over Quayle's war record, or lack of it, came in the senator's driveway. Quayle emerged from his house, garbage in hand, to face what appeared to be a trespassing press corps employing its much-feared "Gestapo tactics," i.e., questions. To the average American, it appeared as though the poor senator was being hounded by a bunch of inconsiderate jerks who wouldn't even give him time to finish his Eggo's in the morning. It was a decisive victory for the Bush forces. Despite public impressions, however, the media had not been the bad guys in the incident; but instead had been the victim. As Geoffrey Stokes points out in the *Village Voice*, the Bush campaign had actually scheduled the trash-run as Quayle's only "press availability" of the entire day. "So what we got," Stokes points out, "was the candidate taking out his garbage...being 'ambushed' by the press, and 'cleverly' comparing certain charges to the garbage he conveniently happened to be carrying."



By David Moberg

CHICAGO

VETERAN ORGANIZER MILT COHEN, co-chair of the Chicago Voter Registration Coalition, was worried. At mid-September with a few weeks left for voter registration before the fall election, only 25,000 new Chicago voters had been added to the rolls. Since registration was down 150,000 from the peak in 1983, voter decline in November seemed inevitable. In 1984 there had been 10,000 deputy registrars at work; this year there are only 3,000.

That can't be good news for Michael Dukakis. He needs a big win in this heavily Democratic city to have a chance at taking Illinois, one of the key swing states.

If Dukakis wins this fall, a few tens of thousands of votes in several similar swing states will probably make the difference. But despite some serious efforts at voter registration underway, it seems that Dukakis and his allies have not given registration a high priority.

The campaign seems more interested in wooing undecided voters as well as Democrats who voted for Reagan.

There are conflicts between reaching Reagan Democrats and mobilizing new black voters. But an attack on economic privilege and irresponsible power coupled with a gut appeal to the needs of the average working person at least potentially unites them. Dukakis, however, seems unwilling to take that gamble.

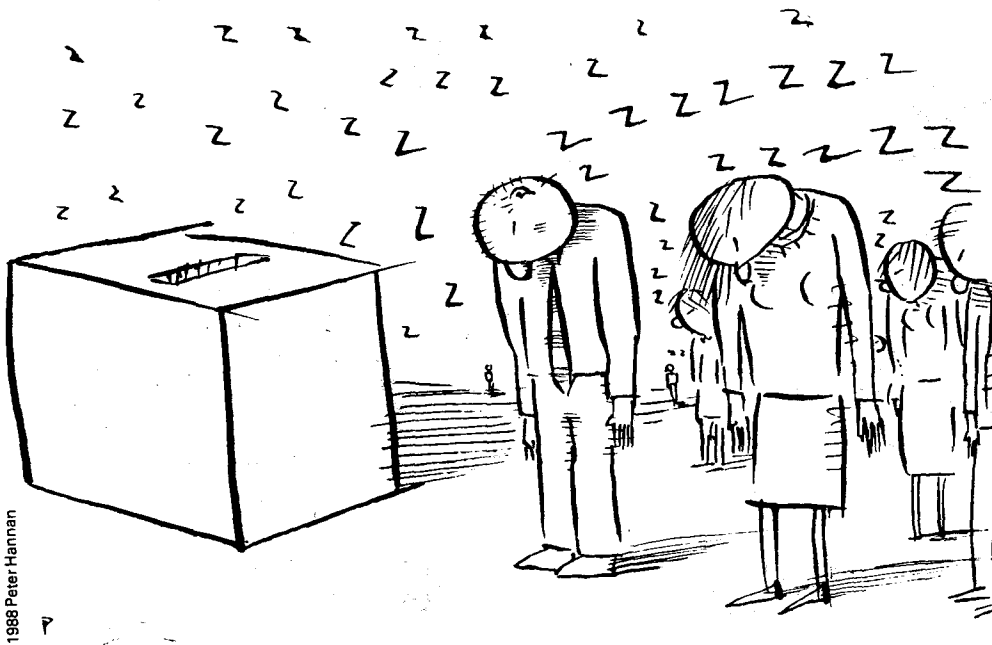
**What's gone wrong?** The Chicago effort suffers more from lack of volunteer enthusiasm than lack of money, but other voter registration efforts around the country report problems with money—too little or too late. Yet Rob Stein, executive director of USA Votes, a voter registration promotion committee, says resources and efforts most helpful to Democrats are similar to 1984. Despite a big push four years ago by Democrats and liberal, non-partisan groups, Republican registration nationally has risen about 2.2 percent since 1984 compared to a 2.3 percent Democratic drop, according to research done for the *National Journal*.

Last week a simmering disagreement between the Dukakis campaign and Jesse Jackson was patched up with announcement of a national program for voter registration coordinated by a Jackson ally. It will supplement voter registration to be carried out with part of the Democrats' planned \$50 million infusion into state parties.

But Frances Fox Piven, co-author with Richard Cloward of a new book, *Why Americans Don't Vote*, and a director of Human SERVE, a voter registration group, said the reconciliation was "ridiculous. You can't do voter registration if you decide to do it in mid-September." Her group has advocated voter registration through state human service agencies as a way to reach the under-registered poor. The organization's lobbying has increased the number of states where it's done. Dukakis and the Democratic Party, without using any money could have expanded such efforts, Piven said. Yet Dukakis hasn't been sympathetic to this registration strategy, even in his home state.

Furthermore, several observers said that non-partisan groups had expected Dukakis backers to channel large amounts of non-campaign money—around \$5 million—into

## The Democrats' apathy about voter registration



non-partisan voter registration after the convention. A source close to the Dukakis campaign said there had been serious intentions to do voter registration, but the money simply wasn't raised. Despite its premium on reaching party defectors of Democratic-leaning independents, the campaign did not intend that to undermine work in minority neighborhoods, the source said. Now the task will not be expanding minority votes but holding even, replacing those purged from the rolls.

Sonia Jarvis, executive director of the National Coalition on Black Voter Participation (whose registration campaign is dubbed Op-

**One study says GOP registration rose 2.2 percent since 1984. Democratic registration dropped 2.3 percent.**

eration Big Vote), said her group had hoped to raise \$650,000, but will be lucky to reach \$500,000. "We didn't see the all-out commitment to registration we saw in 1984," she said. Project Vote, registering primarily blacks in 13 states, has about the same money as in 1984, but less than expected, said executive director Sandy Newman. The group gambled and expanded its operations—but may have to cut back this month, even though it is the time of peak voter-registration efficiency.

**Containing Jackson:** Several groups that focus on black voter registration report that they have had problems raising money or getting it early because some funders did not want to swell Jesse Jackson's base. "It's certainly true of some of our donors," Newman said, an observation seconded by both Jarvis and Curtis Gans of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate. "But it's hard to know how big a factor that is."

Although Gans estimates that money for non-partisan registration drives is down, Stein says that in 1987-88 liberal groups doing voter registration, issue-mobilization

## CAMPAIGN 88

and get-out-the-vote work will spend around \$8 million, compared to \$6.5 million in 1983-84. But the resources will be concentrated in 20 key states, instead of being spread over 40 as in '83-84.

Stein estimates that the work may net a million new voters. Similar efforts four years ago were said to produce 2.5 million voters, but that number is probably highly inflated. Many groups seem to be putting relatively more effort into getting out the vote, less into registration itself. But registration is targeted on key battlegrounds, with major drives in states like Texas and California, where more than \$3 million is being raised to register voters.

Modest efforts can be decisive in the right place. In the four presidential races since 1952 that did not involve an incumbent, a shift of 87,000 votes or less in a few states could have changed the outcome.

With almost as many non-voters as voters even in presidential elections, voter registration and turnout in the U.S. is a potential bombshell. What would these citizens do if they came to the polls? Why don't they vote?

**What 1896 means to 1988:** Piven and Cloward's recent contribution to the voluminous debate, like most predecessors, takes as the turning point the election of 1896, when business forces amassed a mighty campaign against William Jennings Bryan, the Democratic candidate with Populist backing. Voter turnout had been rising in the late 19th century, mobilized by both "tribalism" of ethnicity and religion and "clientelism" of patronage politics as much as by civic high-mindedness, they argue. But Populists presented a novel class threat at the polls to the new industrial barons.

Piven and Cloward argue that voter participation declined steadily after 1896 not

only because competition between parties dropped as Republicans consolidated power but also because of legal changes in parties, ballots, registration procedures and other electoral institutions. These alterations included poll taxes and literacy tests. They contend that is the legacy of these institutional changes more than the special psychology of Americans that account for why U.S. eligible voter turnout is so much lower than in any comparable democracy (although the 87 percent turnout of those registered in 1980 puts the U.S. in the middle rank).

Voting restrictions have generally decreased greatly, although only recently, but they are still greater than in most of Western Europe, where registration is virtually automatic. But the two main parties have been shaped by the competition for the constricted electorate. The civil rights movement in the South upset the old New Deal party alignment, but the Democrats have had a hard time coming to terms with the change. There has often been a conflict between the electorate local Democratic officeholders favor out of their self-interest and the electorate needed by Democratic presidential contenders.

Overwhelmingly U.S. non-voters are more likely to be poor, modestly educated or black, although black and white differences in registration and voting are narrowing. Yet the steady decline in voter turnout since 1960, reversed only by a slight uptick in 1984, has affected voters across the board. In a 1987 study political scientists Ruy A. Teixeira claimed that the decline since 1960 in voter participation stemmed from decreased sense of political efficacy, less rootedness in a community and declining involvement in campaigns. Piven, on the other hand, stresses the decreased interest or ability of big city political organizations or unions to mobilize voters as causes of the decline.

Gans argues that the problem is motivation, not registration. But Project Vote claims that once it got its poor black constituents registered, 82 to 87 percent went to the polls. A State University of New York study showed 70 percent of welfare office voter registrants actually voted.

**Would unregistered be Democrats?** The poor are more Democratic. But even if a higher percentage of them are registered, they wouldn't necessarily vote according to their economic or class interests. Yet, Piven maintains that "if you eliminate formal barriers, you'd have a surge in participation, and that might very well change the character of the political parties." Gans, on the other hand, says it depends on who gets registered. New ethnic white low-income voters could go Republican "given no common-man class advocacy on the part of the Democratic Party."

Despite some studies that show few differences in candidate preference between non-voters and voters, one academic study concluded that if non-voters had come to the polls in 1980 Carter would have won, but they wouldn't have saved Mondale in 1984.

Ultimately the give-and-take of political battle for the non-voters, the development of themes and organizations, will decide which way they go. But the Dukakis campaign clearly has not chosen that challenge. This year non-voters will probably stay home in the same large numbers. They will still be waiting for someone to bring them in. □



By Alan Gilchrist and  
Louise Halper

**P**RESIDENT REAGAN HAS SET THE STAGE FOR deep cuts in nuclear arms," Michael Dukakis told the Democratic National Convention in his acceptance speech. But having set the stage, the president seems reluctant to set foot on it.

Nonetheless, the logic of the current state of arms control negotiations continues to point to the wisdom of concluding a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in the waning days of the Reagan administration. Such a treaty would reduce by 50 percent the number of nuclear weapons that the two superpowers have targeted at each other's homelands.

At the Moscow summit in June progress appears to have been made in delineating the specifics of such a treaty. The major unresolved treaty provision appears to be how to deal with the hard-to-verify submarine-launched cruise missiles (SLCM), and that is not insoluble. For example, senior arms control adviser Paul Nitze has proposed simply banning SLCM's until a verification plan can be agreed upon.

On the other hand, the Reagan administration still must answer the question on the table since the first Reagan-Gorbachov summit in Geneva in 1985: what will the U.S. do about "Star Wars"?

**START and Star Wars:** The Soviets have consistently maintained that a high-tech missile defense system such as President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) would be destabilizing, particularly if accompanied by START's major reduction in offensive missiles. Originally the Soviets demanded that the U.S. renunciate SDI, which they maintain is banned under the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. The U.S., however, came up with a new "broad" interpretation of the ABM in order to exclude Star Wars from the treaty.

But over the course of the past three years the Soviets have moderated their position on how to avoid destabilization. It will be difficult for the Soviets to compromise further. So it's now up to the American side to admit the possibility of destabilization, by recognizing the linkage between defense and offense, between the ABM treaty and a START treaty.

The form of that compromise would be the extension of the ABM treaty for seven to 10 years more accompanied by the right of either side to pull out of a START missile reduction agreement if the other side violates the ABM ban on defensive weapons. The Soviets do not appear to want an explicit U.S. renunciation of SDI, nor do they appear to insist on developing a statement of what aspects of testing and development are unacceptable.

At the same time that the Soviets have been retreating to a last fall-back position, Congress has demanded that the administration accept similar concessions. The now-vetoed defense authorization bill for fiscal year 1989 cut funds for Star Wars and the money is not likely to be replaced in any new bill. In the same legislation, Congress indicated that it would not provide any money for SDI testing that threatens to violate the traditional, or "narrow," interpretation of the ABM treaty as ratified. Consequently, State Department legal adviser Abraham Sofaer, the leading administration proponent of the "broad" interpretation, has retreated in the face of scathing congressional criticism, conceding that the broad



## ARMS CONTROL

# Strategic weapons pact before Reagan exits?

interpretation is "not necessarily" the correct one. And Sen. Sam Nunn (D-GA), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has made clear that, in his very influen-

## The Reagan administration still must answer the question on the table since the first superpower summit. What will the U.S. do about Star Wars?

tial view, even the broad interpretation would not permit the tests required to develop a Star Wars system.

**Technicalities:** In addition to the congressional objections, SDI has also been criticized on technical grounds. Two government scientific panels, Congress' Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) and the Pentagon's Defense Science Board, have concluded that the ABM treaty ought not to be sacrificed to a vision of Star Wars that is currently not technically attainable.

The Defense Science Board recommended slowing down plans for SDI deployment, dividing it into half a dozen stages and deferring those stages that would violate ABM until some time after 1994. This is roughly the period of time in which ABM adherence would be required by the Soviets in a new START treaty.

The OTA study focussed on the potential fallibility of the computer software needed to realize the goal of stopping every one of the thousands of missiles that would be launched in a full-scale attack. Pentagon scientists, however, defended SDI's technical potential (see accompanying story).

Aside from technical and congressional problems, SDI faces yet another challenge. It may not even survive the end of the Reagan administration. Neither presidential candidate has demonstrated President Reagan's

strength of commitment to Star Wars. Michael Dukakis opposes a major SDI effort, while George Bush has expressed reservations about the system's cost and says deployment will take place when the system is "viable," which would probably be decades off.

So both candidates are fairly likely to support a START treaty linked to no more than a decade of ABM adherence. If Reagan does not sign the treaty, a president who is not a true believer in Star Wars might complete the treaty and get credit for a major breakthrough, credit that could have been Reagan's.

**The big push:** The Soviets have made no secret of their desire for Reagan's imprimatur on a START treaty and would prefer to conclude a deal with him rather than waiting for a new president to be elected and brought up to speed on arms control.

Because of this, they are willing, in effect, to limit their Star Wars demands to ABM

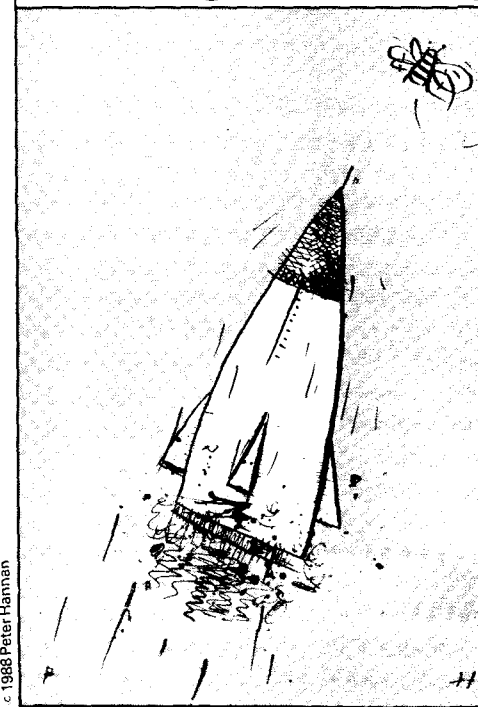
linkage, even though the next president might make concessions on SDI. Curtailed by Congress, attacked on technical grounds and not guaranteed of a long life after the Reagan administration ends, it is hard to understand why SDI should block the completion of START.

As a bargaining chip to gain Soviet concessions, START is most valuable from now to the end of the Reagan administration. But it is hard to tell what is going on behind the scenes. Richard Perle, a long-time opponent of arms control and former assistant secretary of defense under Caspar Weinberger, says the administration is "in a hurry to conclude" a START treaty, though there is now no public appearance of haste. Although Perle did not say so, it is possible that electoral anxieties may motivate the president to "pound his fist on the table," as Soviet General-Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov advised, and strike a deal.

Both sides agreed in Moscow that a fifth summit was not out of the question. Talks resumed in Geneva in mid-July. An exquisitely small step now could lead to the major arms control treaty of the nuclear age. □

**Alan Gilchrist** is a professor of psychology at Rutgers University and a member of the Union of Concerned Scientists. **Louise Halper** is a member of the Lawyers Alliance for Nuclear Arms Control.

## Employing Star Wars against an Iranian airliner



Will Star Wars work? O'Dean Judd, the Pentagon's leading SDI scientist, said in June that the success of the Navy's AEGIS missile defense system showed that Star Wars software was technically feasible. But it was the AEGIS that, a few days later, provided to the crew of the U.S.S. Vincennes the information used in the disastrous downing of a civilian airliner flying at a relatively low altitude with no attempt at disguise. A Star Wars system would have a much tougher task. It would have to pick out a real warhead among a flock of decoys at stratospheric heights and would have to succeed thousands of times in a relatively few minutes. Not surprisingly, the Pentagon has now concluded that "crew error" rather than problems with the AEGIS were responsible for the Airbus shootdown.

-A.G. & L.H.





# An urban disaster a long time coming

By Daniel Lazare

YONKERS, N.Y.

**H**OW TO DESTROY A CITY IN NINE EASY steps: 1. Dismantle a highly efficient, non-polluting trolley system that for decades has made the downtown business district a hub of activity. 2. Encourage local industry to flee to the non-union South. 3. Through a variety of incentives (Veter-

ans Administration loans, tax deductions for mortgage payments, public expenditures for sewage lines, schools, roads, etc.) encourage working-class people to desert the city for new suburbs springing up, with government subsidy, on the outskirts.

4. Concentrate public housing downtown so the old urban center becomes a reserve for poor people.

5. Bulldoze row houses and tenements to

## Two sides of a housing dispute

John D'Agostino is a Yonkers homeowner and a leader of the fight against low-income housing in the suburbs. Laurie Recht lives in a subsidized apartment and is outspoken in her support. D'Agostino says the conflict is purely economic, a matter of middle-class homeowners trying to protect their investment. But Recht disagrees. She's received hundreds of racist and abusive phone calls and on three occasions has awakened to find swastikas scrawled outside her apartment. They are on opposite sides of a dispute that has split this city of 195,000 people into warring camps.

First, D'Agostino:

If anyone expects a cursing, sweating redneck leading the anti-public housing charge, they're bound to be disappointed. John D'Agostino is well-travelled and well-read. An unemployed office manager, his chief passions are his backyard vegetable patch, his vast extended family (almost all of which lives in town) and the city of Yonkers, where he was born and raised.

"I could have moved to Texas," he said recently. "I could have gone to Alaska to work on the pipeline or something exotic like that. But I didn't want to. I didn't want to become part of the rootless, transitory American population. Yonkers has been amazingly stable, and when I got out of college and realized that just about everybody I knew lived or worked in town, I decided I wanted to make that stability part of my life. When you're surrounded by familiar faces, it makes all the other changes of the '60s, '70s and '80s that much easier to take."

But Judge Leonard Sand's order for 1,000 units of subsidized housing, he believes, threatens that stability. Develop-

ers may actually wind up building five or 10 times as many apartments, he says, disrupting quiet residential neighborhoods and spreading the blight of downtown Yonkers. He denies he is a racist and accuses the NAACP of using the word to browbeat opponents. "Believe it or not, I used to be a liberal. I really believed that Lyndon Johnson's Great Society was going to create a utopia on earth. But when I look around and see what they've done with affirmative action and the tyranny of the courts, well, there's nothing like hindsight...."

And now Recht:

Active in the peace movement and other liberal causes since the Vietnam War, Laurie Recht was the only person at a mass meeting in January to speak out in favor of scattered low-income housing. "It was horrible, absolutely horrible," she recalled. "People were screaming the most hideous things—'nigger lover' and 'move to Harlem.' I was in total disbelief." Since then, she has received as many as seven threatening phone calls a night and never goes out without a police guard. In early September, the graffiti artists struck again, scrawling the usual swastika outside her apartment and leaving behind a poem as well.

"Nigger lover Jew," it read, "if Yonkers dies so will you, Cuomo, Sand and [NAACP attorney Michael] Sussman, too."

"All I ask," says Recht, "is that people be reasonable, that they compromise.... People say, 'I'm not a racist, I just don't want that element moving into my neighborhood.'" In Yonkers, she says, no one has to ask what they mean by "the element."

-D.L.

make way for parking lots and call it urban renewal.

6. To make things safe for the automobile, widen narrow city streets into six-lane highways dwarfing the occasional lone pedestrian.

7. With absolutely no political preparation, flood the city with desperately poor racial minorities so that whites, many of them refugees from urban disaster areas like the

## NEW YORK

South Bronx, will panic and cause the suburban exodus to swell even further.

8. Leave political power in the hands of a succession of petty, narrow-minded and provincial politicians.

9. Finally, bring in a wealthy, liberal federal judge—who himself lives in an exclusive suburban area where blacks are present only as domestic servants—to accuse the city of intentional segregation and order it to erect low-income housing right next door to terrified homeowners.

**Formula for disaster:** If you follow these steps one by one, the likely result would be the urban disaster that is Yonkers, N.Y.

The object of one of the most far-reaching municipal desegregation suits ever, Yonkers stands convicted in federal court of concentrating its public housing in the town's urban southwest quadrant with the express purpose of maintaining racial segregation in its public schools. The suit and the remedy imposed by Federal Judge Leonard Sand at the behest of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Reagan administration will not improve matters, but is merely another milestone in the nation's ongoing urban breakdown.

Sending poor blacks into the suburbs to live side-by-side with middle- and working-class whites will not solve the problem of suburban segregation, but will only cause whites to move farther afield. Rather than relocating within Yonkers, it will cause them to move to lily-white enclaves such as the neighboring bedroom community of Hastings-on-Hudson, which is legally immune to

## Cities like Yonkers have perished in post-war America not of natural causes but of man-made policies.

charges that it segregates its black population for the simple reason that it has no blacks, poor or otherwise, to segregate. Yonkers, by contrast, has 25 percent of Westchester County's population but 44 percent of its public housing, which means that its sins are no greater than the county's as a whole and probably a good deal less. It is vulnerable to legal assault precisely because it is a racially and economically mixed corner of an otherwise largely white and affluent suburb.

Therefore, Yonkers is no less an actor than a victim of a fundamentally anti-urban system of housing, transport and taxation that, despite the occasional intervention of the courts, continues to promote racial segregation in housing and education. It is a case study in how a city can be fatally undermined in a matter of decades, transforming it from a vibrant and lively community to a trap for

poor blacks. Mid-sized industrial cities like Yonkers have perished by the score in post-war America not of natural causes but of man-made policies. Industry and government couldn't have done the job better than if they had sent the Luftwaffe to bomb them from the sky.

**Back to the future:** To understand how things reached the present impasse, it is necessary to go back to the immediate pre-war years when Yonkers was a compact industrial city nestled amid the steep hills overlooking the Hudson immediately north of the Bronx. Ninety-eight percent white, its population was heavily immigrant and first-generation—Italian mostly, but also Polish, Slovak, Czech, Ukrainian, Scottish, Irish and Jewish. Workers lived in the lowlands, whereas the hills, with their commanding views of the river, were reserved for the mansions of the rich. In the valleys people didn't drive to work, but took the streetcar or went on foot to factories along the waterfront. The result was a series of bustling ethnic villages where people shopped and gossiped and kids played in the street. One life-long resident recalled that when his father, a factory worker, bought his first car during the war, he used it only for Sunday outings. The rest of the time the precious object remained in the garage, where it was polished and re-polished and venerated as a kind of family shrine. In crowded, insular, working-class Yonkers, people walked.

Postwar suburbanization changed that, not only because people wanted a backyard and larger living quarters, but also because government policies soon rendered urban living untenable. The federal government stepped in with Veterans Administration mortgages and money for major, limited-access arterial highways, four of which would eventually slice through Yonkers. City, state and federal money also went for sewage lines, wider local roads, new schools and new firehouses in areas that had previously consisted of little more than fields and woods.

Fueled by massive public investment, Yonkers expanded eastward and northward. At the same time, the traditional urban center fell by the wayside. As auto congestion mounted, Yonkers faced the same Hobson's choice as every other American city. It could stand by and watch as traffic paralyzed economic activity, or it could take steps to accommodate the automobile.

Yonkers chose the latter. Substandard housing and abandoned factories were knocked down to make way for parking lots and multi-story parking decks, about a dozen in the mile-square city center alone. In the early '50s the last of a once-superb trolley system linking Yonkers with Mount Vernon to the east and the Bronx and Manhattan to the south was dismantled. Aloysius Moczydlowski, a veteran of the city council during that period, recalls voting to save the trolleys, but was outnumbered by councilmen arguing that trolleys got in the way of cars and thus interfered with the efforts of downtown merchants struggling to compete with the glossy new suburban malls. The trolleys were replaced by buses, which belched exhaust fumes and were less frequent and reliable.

Moczydlowski also recalled in a recent interview that as late as the early '60s "you could still do all your Christmas shopping downtown." But then Yonkers pitched downhill again as refugees from the urban breakdown in the Bronx began streaming across the border by the thousands—whites mov-

Continued on page 22



By William Gasperini

DANLI, HONDURAS

**T**ALKING WITH ANY OF A DOZEN NICARAGUAN contras who can be found hanging around a billiard hall in this southern Honduran town, one would think nothing has changed in the long war against the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

"All of the commandos [contras] are back inside Nicaragua," said contra "Solin," taking a break from shooting eight-ball. "The fight will go on, don't worry. One day soon we'll be in Managua and the 'piris' [Sandinista 'rabid dogs'] will be gone."

The only thing revealing Solin's identity were the U.S.-issue combat boots under his cuffed blue jeans. Accompanying the young Nicaraguan were several other contras, who unofficially visit Danli to rest between forays inside Nicaragua.

As he spoke, a contra commander drove by in a pickup truck carrying several other men. It was obvious that not all contras were "back inside Nicaragua." Nor does it seem that nothing has changed within the contra movement, six months after the signing of the Sandinista-contra peace agreement last March that outlined steps toward winding down the war.

**Camping out:** With military aid to the contras cut by a congressional vote in February, peace talks stalled and an uneasy cease-fire still technically in force in the Nicaraguan countryside, most contra rebels have retreated to their military bases some 80 miles east of Danli.

In mid-August Honduran authorities al-

## Contras in conversation: facing an unclear future



lowed several reporters to briefly visit the camps, after years of denying access. This glimpse of the current predicament of the

### NICARAGUA

anti-Sandinista forces was widely viewed as a means of placing pressure on an unconvinced Congress of the need to renew military aid.

An estimated 10,000 contras are now gathered in the camps located in an isolated area known as Capire. At least 1,000 more civilian supporters arrived in the camps from Nicaragua in August after a five-week jungle march that left many hungry. The contras said 10 died en route due to illness, and

three drowned in rain-swollen rivers.

Mostly young men, these civilian collaborators decided to leave remote rural areas of Nicaragua's interior, fearing Sandinista reprisals once the contra combatants themselves withdrew. New groups of fighters and supporters are reportedly on their way in search of much-needed food and supplies, dealing a particularly hard blow to the contras by breaking up an elaborate support network built up inside Nicaragua over the years.

In the camps the contras are receiving food and supplies under the \$27 million humanitarian aid approved by Congress last spring. U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) helicopters fly in and out

of the camps daily, while most of the rebels pass time conducting exercises. Morale is generally reported to be high, as most of the rebels continue to insist they can and will continue to fight, even if military aid is not renewed.

"Look, the struggle is never-ending," said contra Ramon Gonzalez, resting in a civilian refugee camp north of Danli. "In the beginning we didn't have any aid, and still we fought. Look at my equipment, most of it I captured in battle with rifle in hand. Many of us have died, and more are going to die,

**"In the beginning we didn't have any aid, and we still fought...Many of us have died, and more are going to die, but when we do others will take our place," said one contra.**

but when we do others will always take our place. We're going to win this war one day, and liberate Nicaragua by kicking the communists out."

Yet despite these heady assertions, and the denials that the contras have had to withdraw as their situation inside Nicaragua worsened in the wake of the aid cut-off, the future of the contras now seems more uncertain

*Continued on following page*

## For the Sandinistas, the "year of stabilization" could be the year of living dangerously

MANAGUA—"Our revolutionary process," said Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega on August 30, "is socialist in orientation," aspiring to "produce a bit more wealth and distribute it more justly among the different sectors of the population." The same day Ortega made this pronouncement his government decreed wage increases of 140 percent for government workers and a 125 percent devaluation of the cordoba, the nation's currency, in the third major adjustment of economic variables this year.

But neither the Nicaraguan leader's socialist rhetoric nor the temporary relief from inflation offered wage earners could cover up this nation's ongoing serious economic and political tensions, created in part by the Sandinista government's own economic mismanagement.

For the ailing, war-wracked Nicaraguan economy, 1988 has been the "year of stabilization." In February the government massively devalued the currency, issued a new money and imposed credit restrictions in an attempt to straighten out the economy. But when these measures were accompanied by major hikes in official wage scales, they aggravated an already rampaging four-digit inflation that has caused living standards to fall sharply.

So in June the government took a different tack. It made another six-fold adjustment in the exchange rate and began indexing bank loans. But this time it allowed most wages and prices to find their own levels. Although workers could bargain for wage increases, they were not officially compensated for price rises of several hundred percent since February.

Francisco Mayorga, a conservative economist at the Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE), says that

the February measures were "heterodox shock treatment" for a sick economy, similar to Brazil's policies in the mid-'80s. But the June package was different, an "orthodox," International Monetary Fund-style "shock treatment with prices liberalized."

By conventional criteria, the objectives of the June measures were sound. The devaluation would ensure profitability of all export crops, the country's economic backbone; indexation of loans would stop the bleeding in the nationalized banking system; and wage containment would stem inflation. Though a critic of the Sandinistas, Mayorga credits them with having "the political will to correct—to rectify—the economy's course."

**Unequal equilibrium:** But among the revolution's supporters, the conventional economic policies have raised eyebrows. While it may be necessary to spur economic recovery, giving more money to capitalist export farmers while holding down workers' salaries redistributes income in what for most Sandinistas is the wrong direction. And stabilization always brings recession with it. During the first six months of the year, Nicaragua's industrial product fell by almost 30 percent, throwing thousands out of work.

The government's moves have wrung grudging approval out of the anti-government Agricultural Producers Association, a major beneficiary of the measures. Association head Ramiro Gurdian nevertheless remains critical of the Sandinistas' overall economic approach. His group wants nothing less than a complete liberalization of the economy, with the government abandoning all controls and giving them, the capitalists, a major voice in policy.

Strict wage containment has helped to moderate the country's hyperinflation.

Though prices nearly doubled in June, reflecting the devaluation, the July increase was down to 45 percent. Officials further count as one of their victories a levelling off of black-market demand for the dollar, which has stabilized at 400 cordobas. The new official exchange rate is 180 cordobas to the U.S. dollar.

But to those living in Managua's poor barrios, these "victories" have been pyrrhic ones. Maria Garcia, who, along with five daughters, sells tortillas and an assortment of other foodstuffs in a neighborhood called "Jonathán González," says that "since the money change we don't sell much; people just don't have any money." Pointing to two of her 19 grandchildren, she indicates the consequences for her family: "They're soon going to be malnourished."

Garcia's case confirms that there is hunger and increasing malnutrition among the poor. Government officials are hoping bountiful corn and bean harvests will shortly ease shortages from last year's drought, but admit that for the moment people are hurting.

**Everybody's a critic:** The heavy short-term cost of the economic package has sparked criticism from normally pro-Sandinista intellectuals. The July edition of *Envío*, a magazine published by the Jesuit-run Central American Historical Institute, ran a polemic against the government policies written by Father Peter Marchetti, an American sociologist and longtime expert on Nicaragua's agrarian reform. Terming the June measures a "package without people," Marchetti charged that the government's stabilization strategy was shortsighted and implied that it was imposing unnecessary hardship on the poor.

Intellectuals aren't the only ones ques-

tioning current policies. The Sandinistas also face challenges from the far left, which has been eager to take advantage of worker dissatisfaction with government wage levels. In a Managua brewery, newly elected Communist Party union leaders began demanding major increases. Sandinista unions responded with repression, and the firm's managers fired the Communist leaders. These heavy-handed tactics have caused dissension within Sandinistas' own ranks, with longtime union militants calling for a return to persuasion in dealing with union opposition.

Meanwhile, the political right in Nicaragua has also been attempting to exploit the deepening economic distress. In addition to his role as entrepreneurial leader, Ramiro Gurdian is acting head of the right-wing Nicaraguan Democratic Coordinator. Gurdian called for a major anti-government demonstration on September 4 that he claimed could attract 100,000 opponents. Asked why he believed the right could pull out that number—10 times more than any previous rally—Gurdian replied bluntly that "the new factor in the political equation is hunger." Fortunately for the Sandinistas, the proposed rally fizzled when, one by one, numerous opposition factions bowed out or claimed they had "not been invited."

But though the Sandinistas may have temporarily quieted attempts at political destabilization, they will continue to face rough sledding on the economic terrain for some time to come. Until the military conflict—which eats more than half the budget—is solved, all here agree that there is no fundamental solution to Nicaragua's economic dilemma.

—David R. Dye



Continued from preceding page  
than ever.

**New Lebanon?** Finding at least physical if not military replenishment in the bases, the contras are hoping that the political tide will turn in distant Washington.

Not the least of concerned parties given this situation is Honduras, worried that a final end to military aid would leave thousands of armed men inside the country. Honduran President Jose Azcona Hoyo recently expressed fears his nation may become a new Lebanon, should the contras have nowhere else to go.

After years of official denials, he also admitted for the first time recently that the bulk of the rebel forces are indeed in Honduran territory. But he placed the blame for this squarely on Managua.

"It is not possible to be a simple spectator of what happens in Nicaragua, or of seeking a political solution to the situation there,"

the silver-haired chief executive said. "If these people were fighting and have now decided to stop fighting, they bring with them obvious negative repercussions for Honduras."

With new Sandinista troop movements also reported near the border area and Managua perhaps preparing for a final push against the rebel forces, Azcona accepted a proposal by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega for an international force to patrol the border. The area was the scene of heavy fighting last March as Sandinista troops struck at the contra bases.

But the Honduran leader conditioned his acceptance of a patrol on Nicaragua's withdrawing its lawsuit brought against Honduras in the International Court of Justice at The Hague. The suit charges Honduras with violating international law for allowing a guerrilla army to organize and operate from its soil.

**A different Las Vegas:** Adding to the drama is the fate of 12,000 Nicaraguan refugees living in three United Nations-sponsored camps in Honduras, one of which dates back to 1982. Many of these civilians left Nicaragua as long as seven years ago, but others have come as recently as July. U.N. officials count 1,500 new refugees in 1988, along with thousands more who enter Honduras illegally.

The new arrivals are directed to an isolated settlement known as Las Vegas, a two-hour ride over rough back roads from Danli. Prohibited by Honduran law from working or circulating freely, the refugees subsist on meager food rations and spend their days performing services within the camp.

Recent heavy rains forced most of Las Vegas' 3,000 residents into temporary tent encampments, abandoning the well-built wooden structures in which most have lived since the camp's founding in May 1987.

Many of the refugees are young men who fled Nicaragua's obligatory military draft, such as 20-year-old Juan Francisco Ramirez. Helping move wooden cots and some furniture along a muddy trail to higher ground after the floods, Ramirez lamented his plight.

"I've been here five years; it's time totally lost. I've only passed primary school, as there're no higher classes here," he said. "How can I continue any career here in this refuge? If I want to send a letter to my parents I have to sell something or hustle up the money some other way just to buy a stamp."

As with almost all the refugees and contras encountered in Honduras, Ramirez affirmed he would never return to Nicaragua as long as the Sandinistas remain in power, saying he left in disagreement with their ideology. Given the unlikelihood of a change in Managua anytime soon, he and other refugees insist they are willing to put up with the grim refugee life indefinitely.

But many exiles also express hope they might make it to some third country—perhaps Canada or the U.S.—as the only alternative to remaining cooped up in the camps forever, particularly if the anti-Sandinista military struggle ends.

"Here we are like interns, just prisoners, because in reality our freedom of movement is only the 17 acres in the camp itself where we can circulate freely," said Leonte Gutierrez, resident of the older Hortalizas camp located 15 miles from Las Vegas. "If another country allows us to live better, to work and be free, then we would have to give up the fight and leave. But that would only happen if the resistance (contras) also abandons the fight."

Gutierrez said he was imprisoned by the Sandinistas in 1982 for belonging to an underground rebel organization that operated in the early days of the contra war. He left after being freed in 1985. Like most of the refugees, he accused a vacillating U.S. Congress for abandoning the struggle against the communist threat he said the Sandinistas pose to the continent.

**Waiting for Bush:** The growth in the refugee community only adds to the uneasiness for the Hondurans, and Azcona has indicated he places responsibility for the future of both contras and Nicaraguan refugees squarely on Washington.

"If there is no new military aid, these people will have to either return to Nicaragua or leave Honduras," he said. But a U.S. willingness to allow any sort of large-scale resettlement appears unlikely.

Since the peace talks last spring, many observers have thought the contra strategy was to at least hold on in the hopes of a George Bush presidential victory, leading to a new push for military aid with Congress. Yet even a Bush victory is unlikely to alter the balance of party forces in the Congress and make the obtaining of new aid any easier than at present.

For the moment, the situation remains in limbo. The House of Representatives is scheduled to vote this month on a Senate-approved amendment to supply a modest amount of military aid already approved but never delivered. This would obviously boost morale in the contra ranks, although contra leader Enrique Bermudez has been quoted as saying the \$16 million in question can hardly be considered substantial.

Until then, the troops can expect to conduct many new exercise sessions, while the refugees continue struggling just to keep dry. ☐ William Gasperini is *In These Times'* correspondent in Nicaragua.



No Bull.

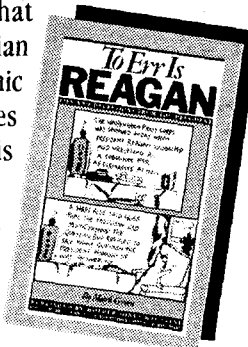
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PERU

The vast shantytowns surrounding Lima are one symptom of the complex problems besetting Peru.

## Garcia's morass of tangled paths, warring interests

By Paul Little

LIMA, PERU

**T**HE CAPTURE IN CENTRAL LIMA OF OSMÁN Morote, the top military strategist of the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) guerrilla army, in June was hailed by Peruvian President Alan Garcia as a major breakthrough in Peru's eight-year-old war against Shining Path. The guerrillas responded with a show of military strength by launching simultaneous attacks throughout the country in which several provincial politicians and a U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) technician were killed.

In late July Morote's defense attorney, who got the first of 12 charges against him dismissed for lack of evidence, was gunned down in Lima by a rightist paramilitary band. President Garcia then provoked a national controversy when he chided his ruling American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) party for lacking the selfless resolve that he saw in the Shining Path guerrillas.

The government's long-held contention that they were merely stopping isolated terrorist attacks had finally given way to a recognition that Shining Path is a growing, well-organized, deeply entrenched guerrilla movement. Led by Abimael Guzmán, Shining Path follows the Maoist "prolonged war" strategy of beginning armed struggle in the countryside and gradually advancing toward the cities. The grass-roots, cellular organization of the Peruvian Communist Party, in which guerrillas do not know members outside their party cell, has been extremely effective in withstanding the government's counterinsurgency efforts.

**Double-edged blade:** More than 9,000 people have been killed since the armed rebellion began in 1980, most of them peasant victims of atrocities perpetrated by both

Shining Path and the government forces. President Garcia's initial attempts to control government excesses came to an abrupt halt with the June 1986 massacre by the Peruvian military of 260 inmates who surrendered after a prison uprising. Shining Path commemorates this event as its "Day of Heroism" and has vowed to avenge the killings, while APRA is now forming anti-terrorist squads that will operate beyond police and military jurisdiction.

This political polarization comes as the Garcia administration faces growing public disenchantment with its policies that are blamed for the country's acute economic crisis. Peru suffers from a 250 percent annual inflation rate, a stagnating industry and a skyrocketing U.S. dollar that has spawned a flourishing black market. The problems are compounded by the corrupt influence wielded by the rich cocaine barons of Peru's eastern mountain valleys, where 60 percent of the world's raw coca is cultivated.

When Garcia assumed power in 1985, most Peruvians hoped that this young president (he was 36 at the time) would put Peru on the path to social development and economic growth. And his first two years in power were heady as he cut inflation, increased public spending with the money saved from limiting external debt payments and offered extensive credit to the agricultural sector. But these reforms eventually faltered due to official corruption, inadequate planning and a recalcitrant oligarchy that successfully blocked government attempts to nationalize Peru's banks.

The Garcia administration's shortcomings, however, must be understood in light of Peru's centuries-old problems of skewed development. Peru's agriculture requires enormous transfers of money and technology to bring it out of the feudal ages. The

*pueblos jóvenes* (young towns) housing millions on the outskirts of Lima demand enormous investments in infrastructure just to raise them above poverty levels. And tremendous industrial growth would be needed to absorb the masses of informal workers currently at the margins of the economy.

No one on the democratic electoral scene has provided lasting solutions to these problems. As a result, Shining Path's alternative of a Maoist revolution is increasingly popular not only among Indian peasants in the countryside, who suffer from extreme poverty and racism, but also among young people in Lima who see the revolutionary option as the only way out of the morass. Indeed, Shining Path sympathizers control the large San Marcos University in the heart of Lima and produce a daily newspaper.

**Other paths:** Amid this volatile environment, Pope John Paul II visited Peru for three days in May. In the Andean town of Ayacucho, the heart of Sendero strength, he preached against insurrectional violence. In Lima, in a speech to two million people, he talked of the importance of loving one's neighbors and helping the poor. His presence served to pacify the population for the moment, but his vague platitudes offered no concrete solutions to Peru's increasingly desperate situation and may have only bought time until the 1990 elections.

Political blocs on the right and the left are already organizing for these elections. The Democratic Front, a coalition of rightist parties, is regrouping using the figure of popular writer Mario Vargas Llosa, who was also instrumental in the conservative fight against bank nationalizations. Their ideological treatise is a book entitled *The Other Path*, a direct counter-reference to the Shining Path, by laissez-faire economist Hernando de Soto.

The book's central argument is that Peru's

large informal economy of street vendors and artisans have a petit-bourgeois mentality, not a proletarian one, and that a lifting of governmental bureaucracy will unleash their entrepreneurial energy and produce tremendous capitalist growth. A return to mercantilist economics, however, does not address the problems of unequal development and oligarchic rule that are at the core of Peru's dilemma.

Meanwhile, the United Left, a confederation of socialist and communist parties that have chosen to work within the electoral framework, have an excellent chance of gaining power in the upcoming elections if they remain united, a difficult task for a group accustomed to factional in-fighting. Shining Path considers United Left revisionists and shuns them. Nevertheless, the United Left is making strong inroads in the swelling *pueblos jóvenes* by promising structural changes in Peruvian society. They could represent the last chance of turning the country around within the electoral framework.

President Garcia recently expressed his awareness and frustration of Peru's plight when he stated in a public interview, "The development of political and social democracy is the best means of confronting terrorism. But this presupposes that we have major social change, which the privileged groups have so far refused to accept. They do not realize that if there are not profound changes soon, not only is society and the democratic system in danger, but they themselves as well."

The tragedy of Peru is that those changes do not seem to be forthcoming, which puts the country one step further down the slippery path to civil war. □

**Paul Little** is an Ecuador-based journalist who recently travelled to Peru.

IN THESE TIMES SEPT. 21-27, 1988 11





A pro-Pinochet rally: propaganda is the government's most powerful electoral weapon.



Officers at a military celebration in May: 15 years ago this month a military coup put Augusto Pinochet in power.

## The general's election

### Chileans take to the polls in a plebiscite on Pinochet

By Michael Smith

SANTIAGO, CHILE

**I**N A COUNTRY WHERE YEARS OF REPRESSION and disenchantment have immobilized people and bitterly divided the opposition to the military rule of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, there is suddenly a flurry of political activity centered around one word: "no."

On October 5 Chileans will decide, "yes" or "no," whether Pinochet—the sole candidate in a presidential referendum—will remain in power until 1997. The general took power in a military coup 15 years ago.

The "no" vote has united usually feuding opposition forces. On August 30, the day that the government officially nominated Pinochet, thousands of Chileans from all walks of life took to the country's streets in protest. Police in Santiago shot and killed three teen-age demonstrators and arrested nearly a thousand others.

Then on September 4 an estimated 250,000 people marched on the presidential palace here, before being dispersed by riot police. The protests continued the following weekend, as demonstrators showered the president with stones and police shot and wounded 53 people in Santiago.

**Optimism and skepticism:** Veteran journalists say the protests are the largest ever, and opposition forces are optimistic. As one demonstrator said after a recent rally:

"It was not what the speakers said, no one listened anyway. The great thing was knowing that you are not alone."

But optimism is mixed with skepticism. The impression is that Pinochet does not have the votes to win, yet things may not change. "Pinochet's going to screw us, as always. It's rigged, but we are going to vote 'no' to show him the people are not on his side," said seasonal farm worker Denis Riquelme, 18, at an opposition rally.

His wife, Elsie, 23, agreed: "A dictator never admits defeat."

Chileans recall the 1980 plebiscite that approved the military's constitution. There were no voter registration records. Soldiers stood by most ballot boxes. Ballots were literally transparent. Only the government could legally campaign. The referendum legitimized eight more years of Pinochet's power and paved the way for this year's vote.

Even if Pinochet loses this year's plebiscite he will remain in office for a year, when he will name confidants in the three branches of power. Then he will hold restricted elections that will exclude leftist parties. The opposition is banking on the possibility of negotiating immediate free elections to initiate the transition to democracy.

Every night in the weeks leading up to the elections a strange calm came over Chile at 10:30 p.m. as people crowded around televisions in homes, bars and restaurants. On

their televisions, they first saw a mother mention her disappeared son, then a black-listed actor say "dictator" and a child talk about growing up in exile. Images, personalities and ideas banned for the last 15 years came on the screen as the government allowed the opposition a quarter hour of TV time a day to defend the "no" option in the plebiscite.

The impact of the forbidden images energized opposition and rescued Chileans from a prolonged trauma. "I cried when I saw it," recalled Luis Hormazabal, a Santiago office worker. "It was a catharsis, like a victory over the power of the regime."

**Unhappy anniversary:** Fifteen years ago this month Pinochet led the coup and began a regime determined to decimate Chile's vibrant political culture. Socialist President Salvador Allende died as planes rocketed the presidential palace on Pinochet's orders. Congress was closed. Political parties were outlawed. Brutal repression forced most people to keep their views to themselves.

Pinochet has since been adept at pitting the opposition parties against each other, embroiled in debate over the best strategy to defeat the dictator. Almost three dozen parties exist in Chile today. Unity was always considered a dream, but this real chance to bring down Pinochet has generated solid accord.

Sixteen parties, including four socialist



factions, the Christian Democrats, the Humanists, the Radicals and the Christian Left, pieced together a coalition united behind the "no" in the referendum. Their message has offered the average Chilean a means of channelling opposition to the military government.

Even the recalcitrant Communist Party called on its numerous militants to vote "no." Before its change of heart, the party had insisted that participation in the government's referendum only legitimized Pinochet's rule. "We decided to vote 'no' to generate more unity and force for the democratic opposition to finally bring down this military regime," said party spokesman Jose Sanfuentes.

With scant resources, 310 "no" commands—opposition organizing centers—have been set up throughout Chile, from the shantytowns that ring cities to middle-class neighborhoods. Each is alive with activity. Volunteers come and go. They organize meetings, talk on the phone, type out communiques and print fliers. The centers are filled with people that normally disagree.

"We have to work together to beat the tyrant, and we all agree on that," said shopkeeper Mario Carrasco, a Christian Democrat leader at the "no" command in Conchalí, a northern Santiago shantytown. "We can sort out our differences later."

Advances by the commands will make it more difficult for the government to cover up a fraudulent victory. Three parties have collected thousands of signatures to make themselves legal and therefore eligible to have observers at each poll. Massive door-to-door drives helped register 90 percent of the nation's 8 million possible voters.

**The government's campaign:** Pinochet,



Communist Party members at the "no" command in Conchalí. In the foreground, Volodia Teitelboim's sister, and Pinochet is prohibited from the campaign.

who in the past has expressed a hatred for politicians, has traded in his uniform for a business suit and hit the campaign trail, travelling the country, dedicating housing projects, bridges and even day-care centers to demonstrate that the government is for the good of the people.

Propaganda is the government's most

powerful tool. For the last year a million-dollar-a-month TV and print campaign portrays the opposition forces as inept and destined to ruin the country should they come to power. Only recently has the opposition been allowed access to television.

The government's campaign plays on worries that a "no" victory is tantamount to a

return to the Allende years, which many Chileans remember as times of food shortages, hyperinflation and serious social conflicts. "But you can't compare shortages of toothpaste or cooking oil with the crimes committed over the last 15 years," emphasized Isabel Allende, the late president's daughter.

The message is based on fear. If the "no" triumphs, chaos will result. "For the last decade and a half Pinochet said he took power to save the nation from chaos. So the message implies that if he loses, another coup will follow," warned political scientist Carlos Huneeus.

But propaganda is not the government's only tool. There's also terror. On September 8 four teen-agers painting opposition slogans on the walls of a Santiago slum were fired upon by a passing police patrol. The day before two students were wounded by police gunfire as they painted over government slogans. And days later a gang of government supporters wielding clubs, chains and knives attacked a group of youth working for the "no" vote in a middle-class neighborhood in the capital.

According to the Catholic Church's human rights organization, the Vicary of Solidarity, thousands of "no" activists have received death threats. An Amnesty International report released last month cited 128 cases of "no" activists who have been kidnapped and tortured in 1988. They say the culprits are groups linked to the government.

"It won't work, because after 15 years we have become immune to fear," explained mechanic Jorge Barrios of the Conchalí "no" command. "We can't just sit back and let Pinochet have his way."

The increasing violence by government supporters who fear Pinochet will lose has opposition leaders in communities concerned about what's to come after October 5. If the "no" wins, the opposition is resigned to massive repression by Pinochet's forces. If Pinochet wins, opposition forces are terrified of retaliations by triumphant regime supporters. "Either way we will be on the front line when they come to chop off heads," said opposition organizer Patricia Ramirez.

Michael Smith is a Santiago-based journalist.

## Coming home: Allende's widow leads exiles and refugees back to Chile

GUADALAJARA, MEXICO—The political impact of the return of hundreds of exiles and refugees to Chile before the October 5 plebiscite will receive a major boost with the arrival of Hortensia Bussi de Allende, the widow of the late-President Salvador Allende.

As *In These Times* went to press, Allende was expected to fly from Mexico City to Santiago on September 18—Chile's Independence Day—along with important foreign dignitaries and exiled leaders of the Unidad Popular coalition that backed her husband's presidency.

Interviewed here at a two-day symposium on the restitution of civil and political rights in Chile, Allende and other leading exiles said they hope their presence in Chile will add momentum to the mobilization for a "no" vote in the plebiscite.

"The return from exile is not a gift, not a blessing from Mr. Pinochet," said Allende, who has spent 15 years in exile. "It is a cosmetic measure to improve the image of the regime and give it a certain degree of credibility."

Nevertheless, "because the figure of Salvador Allende is still remembered, still very present in the hearts of the Chilean people," she said that she believes her presence "can contribute toward spurring a mass mobilization in favor of the 'no' vote."

Other leading exiles returning include Anselmo Sule, ex-senator for the Radical Party and former vice president of the Socialist International; Volodia Teitelboim, ex-senator of the Communist Party who was in Europe as the late president's special envoy during the 1973 coup; and Hugo

Vigorena, a career diplomat and Allende's ambassador to Mexico.

While the government has lifted restrictions against the re-entry of exiles, Chilean Human Rights Commission (CDH) General-Secretary Andres Dominguez said here that those previously prohibited from returning to Chile are far from having the rights they once held restored to them.

"They are not going to find work, they are not going to be able to maintain themselves or pay into the social security system, they are not going to be reinstated in positions from which they were arbitrarily expelled," he said.

The CDH has documented 17,000 cases of "exiles" expelled by the government and 167,000 "refugees" who had to flee because of political repression. The Chilean Bishops Conference said recently that 1.2 million people have left Chile since 1973 due to political repression or economic hardship.

Dominguez named three groups of returnees facing an uncertain situation once inside Chile:

- Those who became naturalized citizens of other countries—in order to obtain a valid passport, denied them by the Pinochet government—are now on a secret government list of "undesirable aliens" and can be expelled from Chile at any time.
- Those convicted of crimes in absentia by military courts—often on trumped-up charges—and whose statute of limitations has not yet expired face the option of either prison or a new trial for the crime of having entered the country before their statute of limitations was up.
- A select group of government opponents—including Sule, Vigorena and Teitelboim

—have had their nationality revoked because of their lobbying efforts abroad against the Pinochet regime. "We will be entering the country as foreigners," said Vigorena, "or worse yet, we are technically 'apatrides,' deprived of our nationality and without any country."

For the most notable exiles, the return to Chile is only temporary—as a political statement on the eve of the plebiscite and to test the waters for a definitive return later. But other exiles—like Ruben Zapata, elected to parliament as a Communist Party representative for the first time in 1973—are going back for good.

Zapata, who spent eight months inside the Argentinian Embassy in Santiago before going into exile—first to Argentina, then to Peru, Cuba, Canada, Panama and Mexico—was elated about his return.

"Fifteen years have passed.... I'm going crazy over seeing my country again," he said, listing the things he would do first—greet family and friends, rearrange his room, take his children to see where he grew up.

"My return is definitive," he said, adding with a touch of realism, "or until it becomes too risky and I have to go into exile again... something I don't want to think about."

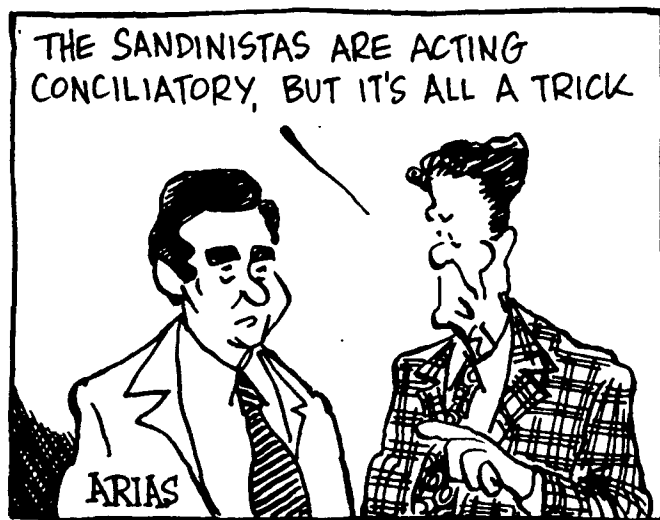
Exiles interviewed here all believe that the "no" vote rejecting Pinochet will triumph October 5 and none expects the government to recognize a "no" victory. But no one seemed quite sure how the government will respond—with a negotiated settlement or with repression.

"It could be a great victory," said Zapata, "or it could be a blood bath."

—Mike Tangeman



# EDITORIAL



## Military aid loss leaves contra threat in place

In a move designed to give George Bush a bit of help, the Reagan administration has apparently backed off its plan to ask Congress for renewed military aid to the contras. Pro-contra Republicans—both in Congress and the administration—wanted Reagan to insist that House Speaker Jim Wright (D-TX) and Senate Majority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W.V.) follow through on their promise last March to seek quick action on any Reagan request for new “lethal” aid. To do so, the president would have to certify that the Nicaraguan government is violating the cease-fire accord signed on March 23—and that the contras are respecting it.

Knowing how easy it is to bait the Democrats on the question of anti-communism, Reagan hawks wanted to embarrass Michael Dukakis with a bruising fight on this issue in Congress. But cooler heads among

Bush’s campaign advisers knew that with some two-thirds of Americans opposed to it, it would be best to soft-pedal contra aid at election time. And apparently they have prevailed.

Of course, it’s a sad comment on our democracy that only an imminent election could get the Republicans to defer to the public’s feelings. You might think that even between elections our elected representatives would follow the wishes of the people they are said to serve, or would that be naive?

You might also think that this setback for the superhawks means that Nicaragua can relax, put the war behind it and get on with the business of trying to rebuild its economy and to work out a viable political system. No such luck.

The Senate has already passed a “non-lethal” aid amendment to the fiscal 1989 military appropriations bill that will almost certainly be agreed to in conference with the House. This will enable contra forces now encamped in Honduras to survive as a potential threat to the Sandinista government (see story on page 9). And, therefore, the destabilization of Nicaraguan society will continue unabated, though with a lower level of day-to-day violence. That’s what low-intensity conflict (see story on page 17) is all about.

## Once again, Solidarity leads in the East

Eight years ago this month, the last of three agreements establishing Solidarity as the first independent trade union in the Communist bloc was signed. Committing the Polish government to an astonishing agenda of democratic change, the accords inspired hope of a more open and dynamic society, not only in Poland but in all of Eastern Europe and even in the Soviet Union. The immediate hopes, of course, were crushed with the imposition of martial law and the outlawing of Solidarity in 1981. But the dream that in the Workers State workers might actually have an organization of their own choosing and under their own control, lived on despite—or maybe because of—the authorities’ dogged efforts to eradicate all traces of the union.

This year has seen the largest number of strikes in Poland since the 1981 imposition of martial law. Coming in two waves, the first in May the second in August, their immediate cause was sharp price increases and continued shortages of housing and food. The May strikes saw a new generation of workers, many of them still in school during the 1980 uprising, take the initiative. In the southern coal mines and steel mills the strikes appeared at first to involve economic issues alone—only in the shipyards of Gdansk, Lech Walesa’s home grounds, did the

strikers demand Solidarity’s relegalization. But by August, when the new wave started in the Silisean coalfields, legal recognition of Solidarity had become the miners’ first demand. And as the strikes spread, Walesa once again emerged as the spokesman and symbolic leader of Poland’s working masses.

In Poland, the Communist party rules but barely governs. It is a society where the contradiction between the one-party state and modernization has reached the bursting point. Polish leader General Wojciech Jaruzelski understands the danger, which is why the Polish government has agreed to formal meetings with Walesa. But Jaruzelski also fears that recognition of union pluralism through relegalization of Solidarity would open the door to political pluralism, threatening the Communist party’s monopoly of power.

And that’s not all. As Adam Michnik, one of Solidarity’s foremost theorists and leaders, told writer Lawrence Weschler last spring, Mikhail Gorbachov’s reforms are in part designed to head off a Solidarity-like development in the Soviet Union. Michnik sees what he calls the Soviet Counter-Reformation as aiming not to open up a true pluralism, but to contain the discontent. It’s too late for that in Poland.

But Jaruzelski’s decision on whether to squelch popular insistence on the right to organize freely and be recognized legally will be a clue to the immediate possibilities of reform throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It’s not at all clear that Solidarity will gain full legal recognition this round, but the end result will either be that or chaos. And Poland is now the East’s bellwether.

## IN THESE TIMES

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NATIONAL WRITERS UNION

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# LETTERS

## Attack alert

**N**O DOUBT SOMEONE FROM THE AFL-CIO DEPARTMENT of International Affairs (DIA) will be writing soon to complain about William Serrin's review of *Tunnel Vision: Labor, the World Economy, and Central America* (ITT, Aug. 17). If past practice is any guide, he or she will argue that the book is inaccurate and biased. The aim in all of the attacks is not only to discredit the authors (Juliet Schor and Daniel Cantor), but simultaneously to dissuade any labor people who might find the book's arguments persuasive.

Serrin ascribes the DIA's remarkable hostility toward the book to rigid anti-communism and simple-mindedness. Let me offer another reason for this Cold War anger: *Tunnel Vision* is actually readable by average union members. A sophisticated economic and historical analysis is being made accessible to local leaders, stewards and rank-and-filers in jargon-free language. Anything that breaks the right-wing's "information blockade" will pay the price, and so the attacks on the book/authors continue.

Fortunately, labor doesn't march in lock-step on these issues any more. As one Mid-western union vice president who ordered 250 copies put it, "Anything that DIA Director Tom Kahn hates this much simply has got to be put into the hands of our shop-floor leadership."

**Dave Slaney**  
President, United Steelworkers  
of America Local 2431, Cambridge, Mass.

## Bloodsport with Mort

**P**AUL BASS HAS NOW HAD A CONFRONTATION with an "American" brown shirt (ITT, Sept. 7). Bitberg draws nearer. He did not follow through as a victim. Good. First time it happens to you, you have made an error. If you permit it a second time...

But the meat of my communication is somewhat different. The third paragraph of the second column of Bass' article ends with the phrase: "...2,000 fanatics on testosterone overload joining in his attack."

Brown shirts, skin heads, KKK-ers are not functioning on testosterone, any more than a rapist is. They, like any other trained (military, see *Full Metal Jacket*) or self-trained hater, are functioning on adrenaline. The misuse of the very good word for a peace-oriented substance is playing into the hands of haters, both male and female, who are exploiting their and (and our?) ignorance of endocrinology.

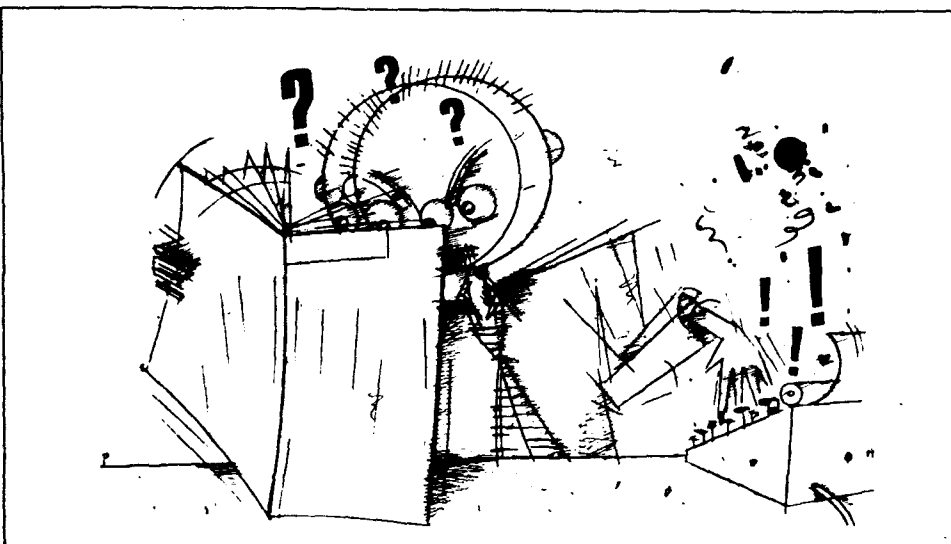
Morton Downey is a demagogue acting out rape based on his own fears, and tapping those of his audience. His methods are despicable. Let us hope that in the next period of history these remnants of Nazism will evaporate with a more realistic tackling of our problems.

**Carlisle H. Schnitzer**  
Atascadero, Calif.

## What we need to learn

**J**OHAN JUDIS' "DUKE'S DOLDRUMS" (ITT, SEPT. 7) doesn't contribute much to a real understanding of the problem. His analysis of the presidential "image" contests since 1964 is shallow fantasy devoid of political content.

His assessment of the '80 and '84 elections is simply baloney. Mondale and Carter were



wiped out not because their "wimp images" fooled mainstream America, but basically because they and the Democratic establishment did not understand the mood of the American people (nor, for that matter, did the American left, which never did learn the lessons of '80 and '84).

What really happened in '80 and '84 was that about half of the American electorate voted with their feet; when it came to a choice between two turkeys (as cartoonist Herblock depicted it in '80) they decided to go on an electoral diet and stayed home.

As for those who did go to the polls, most of them were affected by the general trauma of the American psyche caused by more than two decades of humiliating defeats for the U.S. The embarrassing military defeat by a poorly armed sixth-rate power in Vietnam, hostages taken in Iran (the Reaganites really hit the jackpot in their secret deal with Khomeini to have them held until the Reagan inauguration), the killing of 250 Marines in Beirut, the bombings of U.S. embassies, the kidnapping of American hostages, the invasion of American markets (in auto, electronics) by the Japanese and others, with the consequent shutdown of thousands of plants—all added to the feeling that the U.S.A. was being stepped on, abused by other countries.

The Reaganite managers understood the phenomenon, and they parlayed it into two embarrassing presidential defeats for the Democrats. "It's morning in America again," "America standing tall," "The Second American Revolution," "Peace through Strength"—these and the harping on "traditional American values" of Flag (patriotism), Faith (religion or spirituality) and Family.

But the Democrats (and most of the American left) did not understand it (remember the trauma on the left when polls showed that nearly 90 percent of Americans approved Reagan's "military victory" in Grenada? Had 90 percent of the people become

imperialist jingos?)

After the election, however, at least one Democrat, Tip O'Neill, did seem to understand what happened in '84. He pointed out that despite the Reagan victory, the American people cast more than 500,000 more votes in that same election for Democratic than for Republican candidates for Congress. Meaning that despite their vote for the "patriotic" Reagan, with whom they disagreed on almost every foreign, domestic and world peace issue, at the congressional level they voted their real concerns about the economy and social programs.

**John Rossen**  
Secretary, The Patriotic Majority  
Chicago

## Arab-Americans in Atlanta

**O**F ALL THE CRITICISMS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN made of Jesse Jackson's convention strategy, John Judis picked the least convincing when he fastened on the handling of the minority's Middle East plank (ITT, Aug. 3).

Judis says that the "Jackson campaign could have chosen a Jewish proponent of a two-state solution," and faults it for giving the amendment's introduction to Jim Zogby, an Arab-American. There were certainly Jewish peace advocates among the Jackson delegates who could have done the job, but Judis misses the point and betrays some dubious assumptions in his complaint. After all, why shouldn't an Arab-American have presented the issue? Are Jews the only Americans with family in and sentimental ties to the Middle East? Are U.S.-Israeli relations only to be debated among Jews and WASPs?

Zogby's speech clearly and unequivocally recognized Israel's right to peace and security, an on-camera endorsement of a position that Arab-American organizations

have only recently come to. It was, in effect, an olive branch offered by mainstream Arab-Americans (who are not by definition radical, as some would have us believe), which has thus far been unmet by mainstream Jewish-American organizations.

Judis overlooks a key aspect of Jackson's campaign—the search for empowerment, of bringing out and giving equal time to the voices of the elements of the Rainbow to be heard for themselves. Would Judis have South African issues addressed by South African whites, absent the voice of the ANC? It might be politic, but it would not be right.

The Jackson campaign, and the supporters of a just policy in the Middle East, showed a great deal of restraint in agreeing not to submit the issue to a vote. To have taken Judis' tack would have been to cross the line from maturity to opportunism.

**Jonathan Weisberger**  
Bexley, Ohio

## Breathing easy

**T**O MY KNOWLEDGE WE WERE NEVER OFFICIALLY at war with North Korea; we were never officially at war in Vietnam. Yet giving aid and comfort to the North Koreans or North Vietnamese in the form of arms would most certainly have been treated as a treasonable act, for they were declared enemies. Khomeini never hesitated for one moment declaring himself our enemy, therefore it seems to me that overtly or covertly giving him aid and comfort in the form of arms would and should be construed as treason.

By all definition, if we had people involved in a conspiracy to furnish him arms in return for his continued incarceration of American citizens who were being held hostage contrary to all the spirit and letter of international law, these people, in light of the fact that they would have been acting in the capacity of private citizens and not as agents of official government policy, were committing an act of treason.

I don't know all the legal implications involved, or the terminology, but I suspect if the allegations published by *In These Times* and now *Playboy* are true, and an indictment were returned, it would have to include the name of Ronald Reagan.

I will not hold my breath.

**Lloyd Reinbeau**  
Frazeeburg, Ohio

**Editor's note:** Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you want to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

## SYLVIA



## by Nicole Hollander



By Gregory D. Squires

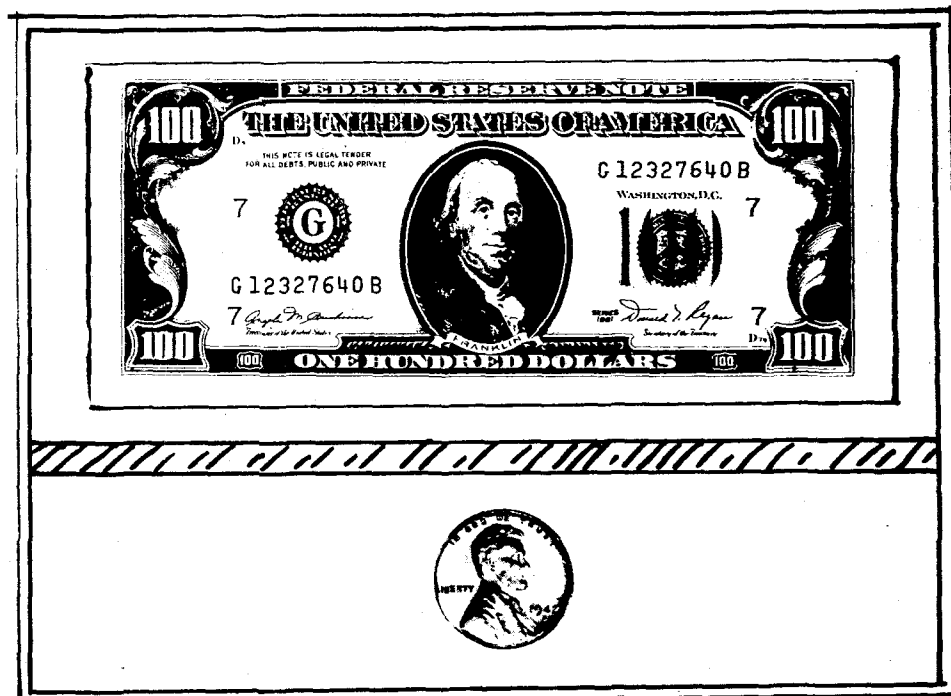
**T**WENTY YEARS AGO THE PRESIDENT'S Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders—the Kerner Commission—attempted to explain why racial violence had exploded across urban America. More important, the Kerner report offered a range of policies to combat poverty, unemployment, racism and a wide range of related problems in American cities. On the eve of the 20th anniversary of that report, Kerner Commission member and former Sen. Fred Harris (D-OK) organized a 1988 Commission on the Cities, which sponsored a conference to assess progress since the Kerner report was released.

The basic conclusion of the 1988 report, *Race and Poverty in the United States Today*, is that "poverty is worse now than it was 20 years ago.... Overall unemployment in the U.S. is twice what it was 20 years ago. And unemployment for blacks is now twice what it is for whites." Once again, the federal government is being asked to take action to address the interrelated problems of poverty, unemployment and racism.

**A dissenting voice:** As a participant at the recent national conference, I must protest our final report. My quarrel is not with any facts presented or policies recommended. But the sum of our efforts was a recapitulation of 1960s remedies couched in a constraining liberal ideology not sufficient for the problems of the 1980s and beyond.

Our report noted a growing underclass, the importance of economics as well as dis-

## Trickle-down won't stop poverty from growing



crimination in continuing movement "toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal" forewarned by the Kerner Commission. But the conference and report failed to acknowledge increasing conflict between the prerogatives of private capital and the public needs of many communities, including the civil rights commu-

nity.

During the post-war years of prosperity, perhaps it was plausible to assume what was good for General Motors was good for the American public. Integration into what was presumed to be an ever-growing system made sense at the time. Deindustrialization and the response of corporate America to declining profits in the '60s shattered that myth.

Supply-side tax cuts and industry regulation at the national level have been followed by tax abatements, industrial revenue bonds and other incentives at the local level as corporations play off capital-starved communities against each other in pursuit of the proverbial "good business climate." What economists Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison labelled the social wage has been undermined in unsuccessful efforts to stem the flight of capital from inner cities to suburbs and beyond.

Such pandering to private capital has destroyed many communities and, ironically, undermined the business climate. Nobody depends more on safe and clean streets or a well educated citizenry than business. Yet fiscal crises facing many municipalities force them to cut essential services.

Racial minorities have suffered the most. They are concentrated in manufacturing industries, blue-collar jobs and inner-city locations most adversely affected by recent economic trends. The typical white household has four times the equity in business as the typical black family, so any profits to be made from economic restructuring have gone disproportionately to whites. Capital mobility is not color blind.

The 1988 Kerner Report study group rightfully called for stronger civil rights law enforcement, more effective school desegregation, a stronger public jobs program and other social programs. But to achieve these goals, more fundamental issues must be raised. The growing public costs of private enterprise must be at the forefront of future civil rights debates.

To maximize the public benefits of private enterprise and minimize the costs, while more equitably distributing both,

those outside corporate boardrooms (such as workers, residents and elected officials) must have more say in how we allocate society's resources—that is, how we manage private investment. We need to inject a strong dose of democracy into our economic institutions.

**Clogging trickle-down:** The first step is to replace random provision of incentives, predicated on faulty trickle-down assumptions, with strategic planning to directly address public needs. By assessing available resources and identifying current needs, growth opportunities—for good jobs as well as private profits—can be identified. Public and private resources can then be targeted to exploit those opportunities.

Where public dollars are utilized to subsidize private development, job creation and affirmative action requirements should be negotiated. When not met, sanctions should be enforced including repayment of the subsidy, debarment from future subsidies and other appropriate penalties.

Employee ownership has forestalled many plant closings. Such businesses have proven more profitable and productive than traditionally structured firms. Where employees have more say in production, wage-setting and other managerial decisions, workplace bureaucracies are flattened and wage differentials between blacks and whites are reduced. More such efforts would further economic development and civil rights.

Plant closings inevitably will occur, and should in any dynamic economy. Enactment of the plant pre-notification legislation debated for over a decade in Congress, if enforced, should ease the transition for the community left behind.

The Kerner group perpetuates Great Society visions, but fails to address the grow-

**Public needs and the prerogatives of corporate capital are increasingly at odds. What's good for General Motors is not necessarily good for the American people; economic democracy is.**

ing influence of private actors in public policy-making which denies government resources to implement such a program, assuming it were so inclined. In examining the legacy of the Kerner Commission and contemplating policies to carry us into the next century, we must come to terms with a dramatically different economic and political environment.

Civil rights and economic democracy go hand in hand. As the Joint Center for Political Studies recently concluded: "Policies that do not take into account the changing characteristics of the national economy—including investment—cannot possibly respond effectively to the economic and social dislocations of low-income blacks."

Gregory D. Squires chairs the sociology department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

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By Marc S. Miller

**F**OR MONTHS THE NEWS FROM CENTRAL America was encouraging. Sandinistas and contras negotiated, and only the Reagan administration was openly unhappy with the prospect of peace.

Unfortunately, the White House militancy was not a far-right quirk. Congress is now threatening to send military aid to the rebels, illustrating the bipartisan allegiance to a rising doctrine that ties the U.S. to unpopular governments and illegitimate insurgencies.

Far from being a compromise, a congressional vote for aid would continue the war against Nicaragua. In response to this military threat, the Sandinistas must maintain their own armed forces. Thus, war undermines the Nicaraguan government by draining the nation's economy and encouraging curtailment of civil liberties.

Underlying U.S. policy in Nicaragua—and throughout the Third World—is the dangerous concept euphemistically named low-intensity conflict (LIC). The stepchild of Vietnam-era counterinsurgency, LIC is "our most likely threat for the remainder of this century," says George Bush, parroting the words of a 1985 Army service manual. As then-Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger told a 1986 conference on LIC, "the world today is at war."

Consider El Salvador, blessed with almost 1.5 billion U.S. dollars since 1985. Every year, with Nicaragua diverting public attention, Congress quietly approves another half-billion dollars or so. As much as the contras, El Salvador epitomizes the way the U.S. wages war with LIC.

Certainly Gen. Eugenio Vides Casanova expects the U.S. to continue paying his bills. As the Salvadoran minister of defense told me recently, he has been assured that "there is no price that could be placed on" his contribution to U.S. aims. In fact, Washington views El Salvador as a victory since the rebels have not yet won. Said George Shultz two years ago, "In El Salvador, we see how the wise provisions of sufficient economic and military assistance obviate the need to consider any direct involvement of American forces."

Such sparing use of U.S. troops and weapons is the justification for the term "low-intensity." Instead, LIC offensives include military operations by surrogates (like Vidas Casanova), covert actions, political organizing and economic and "humanitarian" aid—all coordinated to impose Washington's view on the world. LIC is especially suited to Third World situations in which the "Vietnam syndrome" hinders the ability to overthrow enemies and protect—or coerce—friends through purely military means.

While the pieces of LIC are familiar, as a doctrine it reflects new priorities among war-makers. As Michael Klare and Peter Kornbluh observe in *Low-Intensity Warfare*, the new outlook "identifies Third World insurgencies—and not Soviet troop concentrations in Europe—as the predominant threat to U.S. security." In the words of the armed service's joint low-intensity conflict project, "The day of reckoning is at hand in the Philippines, in Central America and in the Middle East; soon it may come in Southeast Asia."

A 1987 White House policy statement, *National Security Strategy of the United States*,

## U.S. Third World policies threaten permanent war

endorses LIC and itemizes the Third World threats to U.S. interests, with "interruption of Western access to vital resources" placed first. It also warns of the "gradual loss of U.S. military basing and access rights" and the "gradual shifting of allies and trading partners away from the United States into positions of accommodation with hostile interests." The list concludes with "expanded opportunities for Soviet political and military gains."

Washington's adherence to this undeclared world war encompasses Democrats as well as Republicans. LIC's official status rose in 1986 when Congress created the position of assistant secretary of defense for special operations and low-intensity conflict. However, the first nominee, Kenneth Bergquist, withdrew his name after opposition from senators who had advocated the new job: he was too traditional. An ex-

**Dramatic increases in special operations divisions of the armed services make it clear that the Reagan administration and Congress have adopted low-intensity conflict—or, war against the Third World—as basic policy.**

special forces commander, Bergquist's Washington career began in 1977 as a CIA "operational intelligence officer." His duties, according to his Defense Department resume, included "paramilitary activities requiring extensive foreign travel."

**Discriminate Deterrence:** Despite the name, LIC is not limited, as its targets are well aware. Rather, it represents a commitment to total war. That comprehensive view is enshrined in the White House document, which cites "a variety of policy instruments," such as "economic, political and informational tools, as well as military assistance."

Reflecting LIC's emphasis on political ends, it wages war first with non-military means. Col. Harry Summers Jr., until recently an analyst at the Defense Department's Strategic Studies Institute, has cited President Reagan's 1984 pronouncement of a "communist reign of terror" in Central America as a use of "political and psychological instruments of power." The address increased public support for contra aid, while simultaneously intimidating Nicaragua.

Military maneuvers in Central America and the Caribbean act as similar psychological weapons. Sara Miles, author of *The Real War: Low Intensity Conflict in Central America*, points out how maneuvers—like votes for contra aid—have forced Nicaragua to spend money on defense instead of the social programs central to Sandinista popularity. After

the 1983 "Big Pine II" military maneuvers in Honduras, which included 10,000 U.S. troops and a rehearsal to invade a Central American nation, Nicaragua instituted a draft. The U.S. then dropped leaflets urging Nicaraguans to resist the draft.

LIC doctrine has led to a mushrooming—and cynical—role for public and private agencies. *Discriminate Deterrence*, the 1988 report of the Defense Department's blue-ribbon Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy, declares that "the U.S. will need not just Defense Department personnel and material, but diplomats and information specialists, agricultural chemists, bankers and economists, hydrologists, criminologists, meteorologists and scores of other professionals."

The head of the U.S. Military Group in El Salvador has put LIC's pragmatic perversion of humanitarian aid succinctly: "civic action shows the people that the army doesn't just go in and rape." According to a 1987 report by Sen. Mark Hatfield (R-OR), Rep. George Miller (D-CA) and Rep. Jim Leach (R-IA), the Salvadoran military violates U.S. law by having "direct authority over the major U.S.-funded 'civic action' programs." That violation serves U.S. policy. With three-fourths of aid to El Salvador classified as non-military, supplying food, medicine and other "humanitarian" items to the armed forces is central to LIC strategy.

Nevertheless, that report, aptly entitled "Bankrolling Failure," documents a defeat for LIC, and Vides Casanova may lose his job precisely because he carries out the doctrine. Many Salvadoran military leaders are angry that LIC's "winning hearts and minds" approach means they must restrain their death squads. They also resent the control over Salvadoran affairs that LIC gives to the U.S.

Even the Salvadoran military has no dispute with another part of LIC. Civic action may be counterinsurgency's carrot, but U.S.-backed forces also wield LIC's proinsurgency stick. In Nicaragua, LIC makes sense of seemingly irrational contra attacks on health centers, schools, churches, farms and international workers. Says Miles, "there is a conscious effort to remove successful social programs" that generate goodwill for the Sandinistas. Columbia University public health researchers Richard Garfield, Thomas Frieden and Sten Vermund attribute declines in hospitalization and in feeding programs for undernourished children to closed health centers—contras have completely or partially destroyed 65 clinics—and to the need to mobilize more than 5,000 health-care workers into the militia.

**Permanent war:** That civilians should suffer from LIC is not surprising, since it is a doctrine of war. But attacks on noncombatants can jeopardize international and domestic acceptance—and congressional funding. Therefore, among LIC's greatest advantages and fundamental requirements are its low profile and emphasis on surrogates and covert operations.

Nevertheless, LIC doesn't eliminate U.S. combat involvement. If surrogates can't do

the trick, highly trained, highly mobile units—for example, the Army's 1st Special Operations Command, headquartered at Fort Bragg, N.C.—are prepared to perform, in Shultz' words, a "multitude of tasks," ranging from giving civilians medical care to guerrilla operations. And to engage in LIC, Congress has mandated a National Security Council board for low-intensity conflict and an inter-service U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOC).

Dramatic increases in the special operations divisions of the Army, Navy and Air Force bear out the growing commitment to LIC. As of mid-1987, when USSOC was activated at Florida's MacDill Air Force Base, the command covered 34,000 special-operations forces, including active, reserve and national-guard personnel. About 25,000 additional personnel—classified as "special-operations qualified"—have undergone the same training. Rebuilding of special operations, which peaked during the Vietnam War at 3,700, started in the late '70s—under the Carter administration.

Despite this growth, the U.S. public remains oblivious to LIC's actions, covert or overt. But the doctrine's advocates believe that it must win wider support. J. Michael Kelly, an Air Force deputy assistant secretary, says, "I think the most critical special operations mission we have today is to persuade the American people that the communists are out to get us." Public acceptance is crucial, Shultz announces, because LIC is a long-term policy: "The safeguarding of fragile democracies and vulnerable allies against subversion, in Central America or elsewhere, will require more than brief and quickly completed uses of American power."

LIC proponents—inside and outside the executive branch and in both parties—are quietly but consistently engaging in a permanent, offensive war. The battlefield reaches the Philippines, where U.S. dollars fund the Aquino government's war against the New People's Army. It foments civil war in Afghanistan, where Congress appropriated more aid for the rebels than the administration requested. And it finances aggression in Angola, where the U.S. collaborates with South Africa. In every case, the enemy is ostensibly communist subversion, but the targets and the victims are self-determination and the potential for a constructive, democratic U.S. foreign policy. ■

Marc S. Miller is a senior editor of *Technology Review* and the author of *Irony of Victory: Lowell During World War II*.

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E.P. Dutton Company/ Oxford University Press (paperback), 373 pp., \$22.50

**The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia**  
By Andrew J. Rotter  
Cornell University Press, 278 pp., \$29.95

**By Marvin E. Gettleman**

IN SEVERAL SENSES THE VIETNAM WAR is still being waged. In Indochina itself, a power struggle rages over Kampuchea. Reaganites try to find places, like Central America, to avenge the defeat inflicted on American forces in Vietnam 15 years ago. The battle of books also continues, as these three recent volumes demonstrate. One is a right-wing account, fully in accord with Jeane Kirkpatrick's defense of dictators, another—by far the best of the lot—is an exploration from a left perspective. But the one I will start off with is an academic study that occupies some awkward middle ground in the political spectrum.

Andrew Rotter's *The Path to Vietnam*, originally a Stanford Ph.D. thesis, attempts to illuminate the beginnings of the post-World War II Indochina struggle in the fateful Truman administration decisions to back Gaullist France in an attempt to reassume imperial control in French Indochina.

Rotter views the recolonization decisions almost exclusively from Washington's perspective. While certainly an actor in post-war power politics, the Truman administration shared the stage with other protagonists who are unmentioned or inadequately discussed in Rotter's account.

**Invisible Vietnamese:** We shouldn't blame him overly much for not dealing with the Russians, but Stalin after all was at the Potsdam Conference, and there is no record of the leader of the first socialist society raising the slightest objection to the dismembering in 1945 of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (arguably, the world's second socialist society), a development that set the stage for the French takeover.

But the Vietnamese, too, are invisible in *The Path to Vietnam*. Besides giving insufficient recognition to the fact that it was their country, Rotter fails to give adequate attention to Ho Chi Minh's efforts to obtain recognition from the Truman administration, attempts that were ignored much as Ho's 1919 appeals to the Wilson administration had been. Still, given the norms of current

## How Vietnam succumbed to the Washington syndrome

mainstream scholarship, and its fanatical devotion to multi-archival diplomatic research, Rotter's failure to use French sources is astounding. He does use a few tidbits from the British archives; but surely in a book devoted to finding out why the Americans came to the aid of the French, we should expect the perspective of Quai d'Orsay.

Rotter seems to have succumbed to an occupational disease of researchers by unconsciously adopting the value system and priorities inscribed in his sources. He blandly passes on the views that post-World War II conflicts in Indochina reveal the Chinese "agenda...of expansion," and the effectiveness of bold Soviet Cold War initiatives.

### ASIA

No doubt it would be awkward to preface discussion of each document unearthed from the Acheson Papers in Independence, Mo., with the disclaimer "U.S. policymakers believed that...." But without some such device, and without serious attention to the myths and misconceptions that accompanied Washington's decisions, Rotter becomes in effect an advocate of the very views he is trying to analyze and criticize. *The Path to Vietnam* fails to illuminate U.S. diplomacy, French statecraft or the Vietnamese society on which both acted so destructively.

**An old hand:** Ellen Hammer's *A Death in November* is equally disappointing, but for different reasons. An old Indochina hand, author of the 1954 classic, *The Struggle for Indochina*, she has now produced a soft-focus exercise in nostalgia and innuendo, the political message of which seems to be a retroactive application of the Kirkpatrick doctrine—stick with the dictators we've got, because if you help topple them, the Commies will take over.

Hammer's new book concentrates on the Ngo Dinh Diem era, which came to an end with Diem's "death [by assassination] in November," 1963. She disarmingly recognizes the well-known flaws of the Diemist dynasty: its favoritism to an elite of largely Roman Catholic supporters, its tendency to favor landlords over peasants and to repress former Vietminh supporters, coupled with inept attempts to enforce authoritarian rule. When Diem and his sinister brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu (head of the U.S.-trained secret police) began using force to hold down the majority Buddhists, the regime's fate was sealed.

Hammer knows this story better than most; she even concedes that

any hope for an American-backed independent regime in Vietnam was a self-contradictory "mirage," yet seems incapable of disentangling herself from that very illusion. Her thesis is that, for all his shortcomings, Diem and his "first Republic" were the last, best U.S. hope. Diem seemed the perfect embodiment of what the Americans wanted not only in Vietnam but elsewhere in the former colonial world as well: a "third force," neither tainted by prior collaboration with imperialism nor associated with Communism.

Hammer, an unreconstructed Diemist, cannot explain why Diem became a liability in the minds of Kennedy-era war managers, and her explanation degenerates into mere diatribes against journalists whom she believes exaggerated the significance of protests against the Diem administration (especially the self-immolations of Buddhist monks), and against Henry Cabot Lodge, the U.S. ambassador in 1963, who gave the green light to anti-Diem conspirators. Hammer never subjects the various American ideological rationales for intervention in Vietnam (including the "third force" notion) to critical scrutiny.

**The perfect war:** James William Gibson, however, does this brilliantly in his ironically titled book, *The Perfect War*. On the question of the Diem era, Gibson lays bare that regime's underlying political economy, and how it and its largely Roman Catholic supporters virtually made war on the country people of Vietnam. When this split between the regime and the people openly surfaced in the first Buddhist crisis of 1963 (there was to be another three years later), the "need" to remove Diem made perfect sense to U.S. policymakers in search of a "perfect war" that could be publicly justified as being mounted in behalf of justice, and

reform and democracy in Vietnam.

But Gibson does not merely describe the U.S. rationales for the Vietnam War in its evolving stages—counterinsurgency, pacification, the air war and "Vietnamization" (building up ARVN)—he "deconstructs" them in a creative demonstration of the political uses of the sometimes esoteric and apolitical techniques of literary analysis. Despite excessive length and a few nagging factual errors (uncorrected in the paperback edition), *The Perfect War*, in this reviewer's opinion, ranks with some of the best American writing on Vietnam, including Jonathan Schell's early reportage, now gathered into *The Real War* (1987), and Neil Sheehan's *Bright Shining Lie* (1988).

Gibson's answer to the question of What Happened in Vietnam is an immensely improved version of the conflict-of-cultures theory that informed Frances Fitzgerald's 1972 *Fire in the Lake*.

Gibson reads the war as a text, an Orwellian communications system in which the enemy had to be envisioned as both an exotic "foreign Other" and also as an analogue of "us," subject to the same pressures for consumer goods, getting ahead, etc., that presumably animate the typical Yankee.

In such a system the Vietnamese would be thought susceptible to the punishing pressures of technologically sophisticated war-making that would, if directed against them, presumably make suburban Americans say "uncle." And when the Vietnamese patriots refused to give up, the Americans had few alternatives other than to turn up the military pressure; technowar began to take on a life of its own.

**The ultimate datum:** In their headlong pursuit of military victory, Washington war managers lost sight of Vietnamese civil society. So while

Americans enjoyed an overwhelming technological advantage, they could not overcome the revolutionary nationalists of Vietnam, who had fought successive phases of Japanese and French domination. Although Gibson recognizes that this Vietnamese determination, which U.S. technowar managers were unable to grasp, was the ultimate datum in the outcome of the war, his focus on American illusions precludes full attention to the Vietnamese side of the conflict. Therefore, his work has to be supplemented by the one major American study of the Vietnam War that never loses sight of the Vietnamese side—Gabriel Kolko's *Anatomy of a War* (1985).

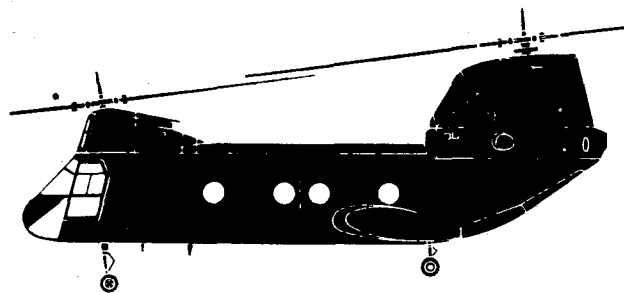
But what Gibson does perhaps better than anyone is to read the nuances of American war rationalizations. He also skillfully shows how opposition to the "technowar" strategy developed among American troops in the field and at the airbases from which strikes against both northern and southern Vietnam were launched. He reconciles two hitherto disparate bodies of American war literature, the strategic theories of the generals and the war managers, on the one hand, and the memoirs of the "grunts," on the other.

Ordinary soldiers, well aware that most combat actions were initiated by those designated as "the enemy," resented being used as bait in "search and destroy" missions designed to inflate "body counts," which would result in promotions for the officers. Pilots had similar complaints about boosting "sortie rates" that put them at increasing risk, with dubious military advantage. Gibson shows how the war against the Vietnamese was mirrored by a related struggle within the U.S. armed forces. Eventually, the ordinary U.S. soldiers arrived at their own assessments and were often able to impose their own battlefield rules on commanders. This was the process called in the field "working it out," perceived by American military brass not inaccurately as a "collapse of discipline."

The work of Gibson, Schell, Kolko, Sheehan and others makes it now impossible to uphold what used to be the conventional idea that Vietnam was a "quagmire" into which the U.S. was somehow unwittingly enticed. The far more accurate view was that Vietnam itself fell victim to the "Washington syndrome"—an ethnocentric certainty that America could never lose a war, naive faith in technological fixes, systematic underestimation of Third World revolutionaries: the ideological by-products of a world empire in unacknowledged decline. ■

**Marvin E. Gettleman** is author of the '60s historical anthology *Vietnam: History, Documents and Opinions*, which was updated in 1985 (with Marilyn Young, Jane and Bruce Franklin) as *Vietnam & America* (Grove Press).

**What James William Gibson does better than anyone is to "read" the nuances of American war rationalizations.**





## Political Passages

Edited by John H. Bunzel  
Free Press, 354 pp., \$21.95

By James North

**T**HE 12 CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS collection hope to see it as a successor to *The God That Failed*, the 1949 anthology in which prominent ex-Communists explained why they joined or supported and then left the party. These 12 belonged to or hovered near the New Left; this book is their public self-flagellation.

Differences between the two collections are immediately apparent. The contributors to *The God That Failed* included some of the leading writers of the time: Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Richard Wright, Andre Gide. This time around, the contributors are somewhat less exalted. They are people like David Horowitz and Peter Collier, the former *Ramparts* editors who now write biographies of the rich and famous; Jeffrey Herf, who teaches in the Strategy Department of the Naval War College; Ronald Radosh, a history professor at Queensborough Community College.

These people are hardly in the same league with someone like Arthur Koestler. But some of them do remind me of one of his most brilliant creations: N. Rubashov, the old Bolshevik in *Darkness at Noon*, who is arrested during Stalin's purges in the '30s. Rubashov, while imprisoned, agrees for a complex mixture of motives to sign a self-abasing, dishonest confession, in which he says that during the decades in which he seemed to be functioning as one of the revolution's major leaders, he was actually a spy in the pay of fascism.

**Memory lapses?** David Horowitz is particularly reminiscent of Rubashov. His abject confession, in the form of an open letter to a lifelong friend who remains on the left, is subtitled: "On Being Totalitarian in America." He continues in that same frenzied spirit; he reproaches this friend for "Orwellian deceit," for "totalitarian faith," and he remarks that "...liberation theology is a Satanic creed." The New Left's greatest crime, one it shared with the Old Left, was "the denial of flesh and blood human beings for an idea of humanity that is more important than humanity itself." In the end, he writes "Our progressive mission had been destructive to others and, finally, destructive to us. It had imbued us with the greatest racism of all—a racism that was universal, never allowing us to see people as they really were, but only as our prejudices required."

Actually, I do not remember Horowitz like this at all. (I have never met him—or any of the other contributors.) I remember *Ramparts* as an exuberant and occasionally excessive but basically truthful and courageous voice in a long and honorable American tradition of muck-raking journalism. I remember Horowitz

as being especially good. His work was passionately leftist, but always fair, independent and non-dogmatic, whether he was writing about corporations and the Cold War or the connections between higher education and the welfare state. In particular, I remember a beautiful and powerful piece in which he linked his own Jewishness to his ambivalence about the Middle East; he included a powerful argument for the rights of the Palestinian people that did not descend into irrational Israel-bashing.

Why, then, does he misrepresent and denigrate his own past? In part, as he explains, he suffers guilt. A friend of his, Betty Van Patter, who audited the books of a Black Panther community project with which they were both involved, was found murdered, apparently because she had uncovered links to drug-selling and extortion. But he does not sufficiently explain why this tragedy, painful as it must have been, should have led him to support the Nicaraguan contras and to vote for Ronald Reagan. Col. Enrique Bermudez, the ex-Somocista who is the de facto contra leader, is the moral equivalent of whoever murdered Betty Van Patter, a thug masquerading as a "freedom fighter." If Van Patter's death had spurred Horowitz toward pacifism, or caused him to withdraw from politics, it would be more understandable.

Turning to Ronald Radosh, we move from real tragedy to farce. His self-abasement seems to have a much more mundane reason: he wants to be noticed and promoted. His autobiographical piece includes little of political substance, and much irritating personal whining; it sounds like a Classics Comic Book version of genuine disillusionment.

It seems clear that he desperately wants to catapult himself out of Queensborough Community College, and he will apparently try anything. In 1983 a book he co-authored on the Rosenberg spy trial was about

to appear ("to rave reviews," he modestly lets us know). He asked Michael Harrington for help. He writes: "Harrington, who had promised to write a blurb for my book, was told by his comrades that he

could not do so." If Radosh really believes this of one of the most honest and honored men on the American left, he is a fool. If he doesn't, he is a liar.

**Overlooked overseas:** Many of the contributors to *Political Passages* say they dropped out of the left due to events overseas; they most frequently cite the postwar history of Vietnam and Cambodia and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Their anguish about the world is selective; the index contains five references to Cambodia but none to Chile, where Gen. Augusto Pinochet is continuing in power, 15 years after the U.S.-supported coup.

None of the 12 seems to have had any real experience in the Third World. (Radosh, who does occasional "reports" on Nicaragua, has not even bothered to learn fluent Spanish; he must read the minds of Nicaraguans to learn how they feel about the Sandinista government.) My own rather more extensive sojourns in the Third World—half of my life over the past 15 years—have certainly given me second thoughts about my actions in the '60s and early '70s. In particular, I wish I had been more active in the movement against the war in Southeast Asia.

My work in a score of countries on three continents in various states of upheaval has taught me that revolutionary war, like all war, is horrible by its very nature. But it is also horrible because it can lead to the kind of brutalization that William Shawcross, who has written with such feeling about Cambodia, says contributed to the rise of the murderous Khmer Rouge there. War also leads to the concentration of power that

contributes to the less serious but still inexcusable imprisonments without trial and other human rights violations in postwar Vietnam. But if the U.S. had not blocked the peaceful reunification of Vietnam in 1956, under elections in which Dwight Eisenhower said Ho Chi Minh would have won 80 percent of the vote, it would be a very different country today. If Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had not expanded the war into Cambodia, that country would not have lived through its holocaust.

Some of our Rubashovs are guilty of the very sin they impute to the New Left: seeing people as abstractions, as embodiments of an idea, instead of as human beings. Collier and Horowitz do not really seem to respond to Afghans as people; people like them may sneer at those who volunteer to pick coffee in Nicaragua, but they did not drop their research into *The Kennedys* when the Soviets invaded. To them, Afghans are a weapon, an abstract argument to use against their erstwhile allies. (By contrast, the left-wing French

**Political Passages is a largely tedious orgy of self-flagellation perpetrated by a dozen former "New Lefties" who swung to the right on Reagan's pendulum.**



## Risks of passing on the right

writer Gerard Chaliand actually went to Afghanistan to report on the Soviet invasion.)

There are two essays here that are genuinely worthwhile. The black writer and teacher Julius Lester describes his journey from fiery SNCC activist in the '60s to the Jewish convert and skeptic about the limits of politics that he is today. Instead of trying to score cheap points he is honest—painfully so—and his essay is reflective and humane. And Michael Novak, with warmth, without recrimination, writes about his fascinating intellectual odyssey from Catholic seminarian to radical-liberal to his present views, which he describes as neo-liberal, or democratic capitalist.

But even these two contributions have a sense of time warp, as if the '60s were just yesterday and the last eight years had never happened. Many of these essays sound as if the Weathermen were in the streets, the major threat to the Republic.

Horowitz et al. are constantly telling us how they feel more "American" after their conversions. But they have not really been paying attention to the terrible effects of the Reagan years in our country—to the crisis in affordable housing that has thrown thousands of our people into the streets, to the corporations grown so powerful and arrogant that they cut corners on health and safety and balk at giving a mere 60 days notice to workers who have given them decades of loyal service, to a swollen defense establishment that spends billions including, apparently, outright bribes, to make weapons that don't even work.

Many on the left have adjusted to the changing times. You could put together an interesting collection of essays by them. The contributors would include: the editors of this newspaper, who have kept an independent, democratic socialist voice going in print for more than a decade, with reason and humor; Bobby Rush, the former chairman of the Illinois Black Panther Party, who is today a respected Chicago alderman and a leader in the city's grass-roots reform movement; David Bruck, an antiwar activist, now a lawyer, who defends poor people in South Carolina against the barbarism of the death penalty; Heather Booth, who, at the Midwest Academy, has done so much to help train the community activists who are adding new life to neighborhoods across the country; Irving Howe, a teacher and writer of integrity, who will be astonished at how he is caricatured in this collection as a neo-Stalinist.

On second thought, there are so many people in this category that such a book would be prohibitively long. And also, such people probably don't have time for long-winded introspective and retrospective essays. They are too busy listening to and working with their neighbors, and looking forward.

James North, an independent writer in Chicago, is working on a book about the international debt crisis.

IN THESE TIMES SEPT. 21-27, 1988 19



**The Carmen McRae-Betty Carter Duets**  
Great American Music Hall Records

By Dean Robbins

## Iconoclastic divas blend but don't bend

**P**OP AND COUNTRY STARS SING duets all the time, but jazz divas never do. It's probably less a matter of ego than of style: when Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Dinah Washington or Sarah Vaughan gets inside a tune, there's little room for anyone else. They barge into a melody, clearing out a queen-size space to maneuver in.

Betty Carter and Carmen McRae, two rugged individualists who came up during the bebop era, need the same kind of elbow room. Yet last year they decided to share a stage at San Francisco's Great American Music Hall, where a live audience (and recording equipment) could pick up on the vibes. It was a daring experiment, because each is a prima donna used to having her own way.

Carter, who began as an arranger for Lionel Hampton in the '40s, writes her own songs and arrangements. She even started her own label in the '60s, because she distrusted the male-dominated music industry. Her iconoclasm has resulted in a sadly underrated career, even though she clearly belongs in the pantheon with Holiday, Vaughan, et al.

**Tough stuff:** She uses her agile voice like a horn, bending melodies idiosyncratically. When she lets a little breath seep into her long, yearning tones, she could be mistaken for an ingenue—that is, until she punches out a staccato scat chorus



**Neither Carmen McRae nor Betty Carter takes any guff, which is why they've persevered.**

or inflects a note to suggest that she's hip to love's deeper ironies.

No one would ever call McRae an ingenue. Her delivery is flat and wry, and she chisels her phrases to a

sharp point. In the '40s she was a protegee of Billie Holiday, but not for long: she soon became one of the best (and most original) stylists of her generation.

Yet McRae doesn't have much to show for it. She's not considered a national treasure like Fitzgerald or Vaughan, and isn't even on a major record label. She seems to vent her anger in performance, working over a song until it yields a bittersweet beauty.

Neither Carter nor McRae takes any guff, which is why they've persevered in a jazz world that traditionally spurns women. Yet it seems that this very toughness could potentially sink their duet. One stage might be too small for such colossal personalities.

But on this release the two singers opt for cooperation, and in the process make a pointed statement about gender. When male jazz titans get together it's often for a cutting contest—a duel to the death to see who's king of the hill. On this date, however, Carter and McRae prove that a female jazz star can be generous without damaging her ego or reputation.

Backed by a trio, they begin with "What's New?" changing the lyrics into an ode to their collaboration. ("You're singing good, I must admit....") Such a tactic would backfire for almost any duo, but not this one. These two honest singers have no use for sentimentality: they feel deeply, and express their feelings through the nuances of phrasing. The sisterly additions ring true.

Yet the mutual admiration doesn't translate as self-denial. Duet or no duet, these ladies don't step aside for anyone. As they trade verses on "Stolen Moments," "But Beautiful" and "Isn't It Romantic?," each stakes out her territory, and it's fascinating to compare how they handle a lyric.

On "Stolen Moments" Carter wants her man back, but she's slightly detached from the situation—she's absorbed with herself and the phrasing of her lament. McRae is more ferocious, addressing her lover directly with a caustic intonation. Carter is the poet obsessed with her own powers of expression, while McRae is the dramatist with a good story to tell.

**Poetic drama:** Throughout the record, Carter and McRae banter, play off one another and meet for celebratory harmonies. They crack up the audience and each other. In fact, the most moving thing about *The Carmen McRae-Betty Carter Duets* is the way they seem to draw strength from their union. Female jazz singers aren't strangers to loneliness; but here, for once, sorority is triumphant. These survivors seem to say, "We're in this together, so back off, pal."

A good example is "Am I Blue?" Each singer takes a turn being victimized by the lyric, in which she's branded "the sad and lonely one." But then, during a spontaneous exchange, the two begin to question their lot:

"I think we're supposed to be blue but I really don't care..."

"I'm leavin' that man..."

"Me, too, baby..."

Finally they come to an astonishing conclusion: "We're *not* blue!" Locked in invincible harmony, they hint at a world where women have the upper hand and female jazz singers get the respect they deserve. It's a world that's big enough for the both of them. ■

Dean Robbins is arts editor of the Madison, Wis., weekly, *Isthmus*.

## Seattle rock opera strikes just the right note

**Seattle 1919**  
By The Fuse

By Steve Rosswurm

**T**HE FUSE'S SEATTLE 1919 IS NOT agit prop. It is "politically correct," but not in the way that most of the left uses the term. It is good history, but not in a textbook sense. Perhaps most important, it is good music.

This is a two-record story of Seattle's 1919 general strike. It is not a collection of songs from the strike itself, but rather a unified series of original songs—an opera, if you will—that follows several characters from before the strike through its bitter aftermath.

The main character is Peter Rinearson, the "third son on a farm," who winds up in Seattle looking for work at the height of World War I. A stranger to cities, high prices and continual rain, Rinearson slowly becomes politicized—not in a thunder-

bolt conversion, but within a plausible context marked by the contradiction between high war-production profits and phony patriotic platitudes, Wobbly agitation, the presence of veterans of previous battles and the need for a sense of belonging.

**Strong political message:** Enter Anna Louise Strong, the most famous person to emerge out of the strike. Strong, who plays a central

role in Rinearson's experiences, intensifies the politicization process. In several wonderful songs, which highlight a masterly lead vocal, Strong tries to shape the working class' inchoate sense of being exploited. In "Street Speech," she offers them a Brechtian lesson in who does the world's work and how that can change; in "The Time is Now," Strong puts their discontent into a larger international perspective.

We then move to the general strike and the working people's decision to run the city themselves:  
*I think it's high time we tried it  
We got our hands on the wheel let's drive it*

*We got our ass in the saddle  
Let's ride it, ride it, ride it  
I swear that we can do it ourselves.*

In the strike's five brief days, they had a sense of what they could do. An old-timer who grew up during the Alaskan gold rush now sees that "new world" he heard miners talking about: "And the Strike Committee, yes my friends, that's no one but you and me. I believe I see that new world coming today."

In a musical soapbox speech, Rinearson summarizes how far he and his people have come:

*Further down the road when the fog has passed  
It'll be so clear that it was here  
We saw the light at last  
Chase the masters from your nightmare  
Sweep the old ways from your door  
The child's not born until you cut the cord.*

It is, of course, not that simple. The strike is called off, leaders arrested, and reaction sets in. Strong

leaves for the "Promised Land"—Russia—and Rinearson must decide if he will "Fight for it all or live off the crumbs."

**Eclectic mix:** The music throughout *Seattle 1919* is amazingly good. In an album with so much music—21 songs in all—one might expect a fair number of clunkers. Yet the double album is remarkably consistent. Within the albums' main genre of rock, however, there are stylistic

### The two-record story of Seattle's 1919 general strike.

variations—most notably several dance-hall-type tunes and some country-flavored folk. The music suits the emotions and ideas of the characters with solid instrumentation throughout.

In what may be its most impressive accomplishment, the album captures a historical moment. This is not "accurate" history, although everything here is "true." Instead it's an artistic interpretation of what it was like to live through the general strike, with its ups and downs and

its utopian, if momentary, sense of working-class elation at having created something new. The characters are real people, with pasts that affect how they respond to the strike and its specific context.

In the end, The Fuse do not downplay the strike's defeat. "I've seen it all before" and "once had dreams like you," sings a veteran of many battles, who had "lived long enough to see what the powers that be can do to you." Three of the album's best songs are about handling this defeat. Strong hustles off to Russia to catch that "comet blazing," while Rinearson takes the advice of a friend, who held both AFL and IWW cards, to dig in and "make it through today to see tomorrow":

*So we've got some things we needed  
They kept the whip in hand  
It'll be a long time coming  
Fore there's justice in the land  
Sometimes you stand and fight them  
and sometimes you have to bend  
But hold on to your sweet dreams  
'til the high tide comes again*

*Seattle 1919* is available for \$7.50 from The Fuse, 6 Yellow Green, Middletown, CT 06457. ■

Steve Rosswurm teaches history at Lake Forest College.



## Eight Men Out

Written & directed by John Sayles

By Miles Harvey

**I**N *EIGHT MEN OUT*, DIRECTOR-WRITER John Sayles scrutinizes two great American pastimes, baseball and corruption. He is surprisingly sympathetic to both games.

Sayles' charitable view of corruption—specifically, the decision by several Chicago White Sox players to intentionally lose the 1919 World Series in return for gamblers' bribes—might seem inappropriate in 1988. After all, these are times that make heroes of those, like Oliver North and Ivan Boesky, who abuse their power by smugly flouting the law. Shouldn't a populist filmmaker like Sayles be more critical of high-profile athletes who sold out their profession and their fans for a fast buck?

Sayles doesn't see it that way. To him the "Black Sox," as they came to be known, were victims. Considered one of the greatest baseball teams ever, the 1919 White Sox were tremendously underpaid by parsimonious owner Charles Comiskey. Yet baseball's "reserve clause" bound them to Comiskey's service in what a federal judge later called "something resembling peonage." And in an era before sports unions or professional agents, the mostly undereducated players had no recourse.

Explains Sayles: "It was a time when the future of America was being decided in many ways. People came back from World War I wanting a bigger piece of everything and the old-style capitalism of the Carnegies and the Rockefellers was being tested for the first time. In the year that this was set, there was a city-wide strike in Seattle and a police strike in Boston. In a way, the same thing happened to these players—this was a kind of house rebellion."

**A cause without rebels:** If it was a rebellion, it was one that backfired. Most of the players involved never received much of the money they were promised for fixing the series—they were used by the gamblers just as they were used by Comiskey. And after the scandal became public, they were again made the dupes. In an effort to save the sport's image, Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis banned the eight from the game for life. The sacrificial lambs included outfield great "Shoeless" Joe Jackson, who took \$5,000 but refused to participate in the fix and ended up leading the series in hitting, as well as third baseman Buck Weaver, who took no money but who knew of the scandal and did not tell Comiskey.

Nor did the 1919 White Sox "rebellion" do anything to alter the financial plight of big-leaguers. It was not until after the Major League Baseball Players Association was organized in 1966 that the players began to have any real leverage in negotiations with owners; not until the mid-'70s that the owners, under court pressure, compromised on the re-



Eddie Cicotte (David Strathairn) keeps his eyes on the bribe in *Eight Men Out*.

# Filmmaker John Sayles bats cleanup in the Black Sox scandal

serve clause that bound a player to one team. Only in the last 12 years have baseball's "free agents"—players able to negotiate with more than one club—helped raise salaries nearer to a level that reflects the athletes' actual value to their employers.

Even on the week *Eight Men Out* premiered, an arbitrator ruled that baseball owners had conspired in

## FILM

1986 to restrict free agents from testing their worth in baseball's new somewhat-open market. The owners, it seems, had colluded to keep down salaries by not bidding on each other's free agents. It was quite clearly a fix, and not too dissimilar from the one in the film. But needless to say, no owners were banned from the sport for life because of that scandal.

*Eight Men Out*, based on the book by Eliot Asinof, is the second half of a Sayles' double-header dealing with worker-management relations. *Matewan*, released in 1986, examined a bitter 1920 miners' strike in West Virginia. Labor issues have

always been difficult topics for Hollywood to swallow—and following this year's lengthy writers' strike, it's certain that most producers will be less sympathetic than ever to such subject matter. Thus, independent filmmaker Sayles is offering a vital alternative to Hollywood's corporate view of the workplace that tends to—with rare exceptions, such as *Norma Rae*—at best ignore, at worst attack, collective organizing.

**Commercial risks:** It has not been easy for the 37-year-old director. *Eight Men Out* and *Matewan* have for years been the two projects he most wanted to realize. Finished screenplays had long been available, but were considered to be commercial risks.

But hostility to labor issues wasn't the film's only stumbling block. *Eight Men Out* is a tremendously difficult film from a narrative standpoint. The labyrinthine "Black Sox" scandal involved two different groups of gamblers and various go-betweens, not to mention some fairly complex financial arrangements. As a result, Sayles' movie is unavoidably heavy on exposition in its first half.

Scandals are necessarily complex, and Sayles shows admirable trust in his audience—in striking contrast to the usual Hollywood urge for condescending simplification. He demands—and through crisp, exciting writing and editing, gets—our attention during the difficult narrative preceding the high-action World Series.

*Eight Men Out* is made all the more problematic by the sheer size of the cast. You almost need a scoreboard for this film—and not only to tell the players. There are also the players' families, the gamblers, the members of management, the journalists, the fans, the lawyers and the jurists.

In general, Sayles gets this army to march in step. Ever since his 1978 directoral debut, *Return of the Secaucus Seven*, he has shown a fascination with ensemble performances—so he's had plenty of practice with the form. In *Eight Men Out*, he gets help from an excellent cast that includes regulars from Sayles' films like Jace Alexander, Gordan Clapp, Michael Mantell, Maggie Renzi, David Strathairn and Kevin Tighe. And he augments his

stable with fine performers like John Cusack, Richard Edson, Don Harvey, Bill Irwin, Perry Lang, John Mahoney, James Read, Michael Rooker, Charlie Sheen, D.B. Sweeney and Studs Terkel.

Not only is the acting generally inspired (Cusack is particularly strong as the boyish Buck Weaver), but *Eight Men Out* is also full of wonderful baseball. The director assembled a bat-pack of young actors with baseball talent. For instance, D.B. Sweeney—a former college player—toured with a minor league team for five months and learned how to bat left-handed in order to prepare for his role as Joe Jackson. Strathairn's portrayal of aging junkball pitcher Eddie Cicotte showed a subtle understanding of a veteran athlete's temperament on and off the field.

**The perils of nostalgia:** Our first view of the White Sox comes through the innocent eyes of two young fans watching their heroes. And *Eight Men Out* ends with a surprisingly similar bit of whimsy. The film's final image is of Jackson—relegated to playing semi-pro ball under an assumed name in the prime of his career—cheerfully tipping his hat after a hit. As the credits roll, we see the White Sox practicing together in happier days—they seem to be simply a bunch of waggish boys. *Eight Men Out* essentially takes on the form of a classical tragedy, and yet it's as though Sayles wants us to remember that it's not his protagonists' downfall that's important; it's how they played the game.

Unfortunately, the director waxes equally nostalgic about politics. Sayles' idolatry of the working man wears thin, especially in some overwritten dialogue near the end of the film in which one ballplayer after another tells how the little guy gets crushed by the powers-that-be.

Sayles' critique is too simplistic. He uses the evils of capitalism to excuse the ballplayers' corruption in the same way that Oliver North uses the evils of communism to excuse his own corruption. In either case, such demagoguery tends to make us overlook an essential point: the acts of corruption are themselves wrong.

But if Sayles' dismissal of personal corruption in the face of societal corruption falls flat, at least it falls to the left. Ever since 1971, when *Dirty Harry* was released, films about Americans rebelling against a failed system have tended to be distinctly right-wing, blaming the failure of liberalism for society's ills. At least *Eight Men Out*'s vigilantes aim at the right target.

Even if John Sayles hits a few fouls in *Eight Men Out*, the film proves once again that he's willing to play hardball when the rest of the film industry won't even step up to the plate.



D.B. Sweeney as "Shoeless" Joe

**Most of the players involved in the Black Sox scandal never received much of the fix money—they were used by the gamblers just as they were used by the team's owner.**



Michael Rooker as "Chick" Gandil



## Yonkers

Continued from page 8

ing to the suburbs and blacks into the thousands of low-income apartment units already existing in the southwest quadrant. Around the same time, neighboring White Plains levelled its old downtown to make way for office towers and luxury condos, a South African-style redevelopment scheme that sent another wave of refugees streaming toward Yonkers. The city's black population, just 4 percent by 1960, doubled and re-doubled.

**Same old medicine:** Caught in the backwash from the New York City fiscal crisis, Yonkers nearly defaulted on its debts a decade later and was forced to submit to an emergency financial control board much like the one that ruled in New York. The city resorted to the usual remedy to dig itself out of the crisis: it cut taxes to lure development. One of its more conspicuous successes was

the South Westchester Executive Park, a glitzy office development in the northern part of town, close to a parkway but far from the bus lines and consequently more accessible to suburbanites than to downtown blacks. The economic exodus from downtown Yonkers continued.

Today downtown Yonkers looks pretty much like a number of American cities, which is to say it's a mess. Getty Square, the heart of the traditional business district, is shabby and decrepit. Stores stand empty, and homeless men hang around a boarded-up fountain that hasn't worked in years. Crack dealers fill the side streets. Although city officials say the crime problem is not as bad as people seem to think, it is severe enough that white suburbanites avoid Getty Square in droves.

A few weeks ago, while the city council debated whether to submit to Judge Sand's desegregation order and white homeowners in the audience hooted and hollered at any

sign of compromise, I witnessed an example of the urban breakdown at its most mechanical level. It occurred just outside City Hall at the intersection of Broadway and Nepperhan Avenue, two city streets that, in an effort to accommodate auto traffic have been widened to six-lane highways.

At the northeast corner, a young Hispanic woman pushing a baby stroller hesitated before crossing. Cars sped by, the crossing signals were all but invisible in the mid-afternoon glare, and there were no traffic islands at which to pause halfway. After several minutes, the woman marshalled her resolve and dashed across the unbroken expanse of sunbaked asphalt. She made it. Dean Grandin, the director of planning, later explained that thought had been given to setting the traffic lights to send out red signals in both directions so that pedestrians could cross without fear of being sideswiped by left-turning cars, but state engineering specifications forbade it. The reason: it would impede the

flow of traffic.

In other words, cars have priority over pedestrians. Once crowded and bustling, urban Yonkers is now grim and hostile, not only to suburbanites but to the people who live in it. Meanwhile, as Judge Sand seeks to allow poor blacks and Hispanics their place in the great urban escape, Yonkers may be poised for its second great postwar transformation. A real estate developer has proposed building six 25-story luxury apartment towers along the city's spectacular but neglected waterfront, while office towers have been proposed for some of the bleak and empty stretches of downtown.

Without perhaps realizing it, Judge Sand seems to be embarking on a Parisian-style solution in which the poor of Yonkers will be relegated to the outskirts while the historic center is returned to the hands of the middle and upper classes. □

**Daniel Lazare** is *In These Times'* correspondent in New York.

## Health

Continued from page 3

aide Leslie Atkinson. "We're just beginning to take a systematic look at the situation and already we're appalled." According to Atkinson, the CBC Health Brain Trust has scheduled an urgent series of meetings with informed health professionals in attempts to quickly address the problem.

Among the more popular suggested solutions are programs based on the Massachusetts model that requires more employers to foot the bill for hospital insurance costs. This approach exemplifies the so-called "pragmatic compassion" of Massachu-

setts governor and presidential candidate Michael Dukakis. Other ideas include expanding the "risk pool" concept in which states establish revenue pools to provide health insurance for uninsured people; bolstering subsidy payments for hospitals serving a "disproportionate share" of low-income patients; changing the hospital-based system of health-care delivery to that of a community clinic system.

These approaches have their champions and detractors, but it's clear that increased revenue will be required for whatever program gains a consensus. The 40-million-plus members of the medical underclass will gain no solace by reading George Bush's lips. □

## Pekar vs. Dave

Continued from page 24

Letterman's analysis of television extends only to its *content*; what he chooses to ignore is the institutional *context* of television.

In other words, there is a reason commercial television is bad, and that reason is, bluntly, that television is owned by huge corporations that make a lot of money off of it. Television is fundamentally a medium for advertising; from the point of view of the corporate pinheads at GE, the commercials are the most important thing on the air. Everything else is filler, a lowest-common-denominator come-on to get people to stay tuned long enough to watch the ads.

**And now, these messages:** Okay, this is perilously close to vulgar Marxism, and it begs the question of whether the people who make the programs in between the commercials are shills or well-meaning artists doing their best in a difficult situation. After all, they might say, the idea of the writer and artist as an independent voice, a moral free agent, is only as old as the Enlightenment; before that, great writers and artists were often beholden to patrons, some of whom were even more capricious and arbitrary than General Electric.

More specifically, great satirists, whose ranks Letterman has the potential to join, can often speak only from unassailable positions of authority. Take the greatest satirist of all, Jonathan Swift, as a paradigm case: he was Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin when he wrote *Gulliver's Travels* and "A Modest Proposal." Had a lowly, Catholic Irish peasant—the Harvey Pekar of his time, say—so much as cracked wise to a British soldier, he'd have been flogged or strung up. While Letterman is a long way from being a peasant, he is also a long way from possessing the clout to say any damn thing he wants on the air. Only someone with nothing to lose, such as Harvey Pekar, can get away with that.

Which brings me to what you might call Letterman's Dilemma, or even, if you wanna get Shakespearean about it, the Tragedy of Letterman (Prince of Late Night). It is the dilemma faced by every artist who wants to create popular art in late 20th-century America. The dilemma is founded on the assumption that any person of intelligence and sensitivity is eventually going to run up against the fact that something has gone wrong in American life. Whether you come at it as a conservative (the family is falling apart, our

kids learn nothing at school, drugs are destroying our values) or as a progressive (communities are falling apart, people are denied jobs and opportunities, commodity fetishism is destroying our culture), something's obviously haywire.

Popular artists, then, faced with the corporate control of the popular media, have a choice: like Harvey Pekar, they can say exactly what they think about the times in which we live and thus remain at the margins of culture, at best only a cult figure, or, like Letterman, they can swallow their reservations and move to the spotlight center of the culture, while remaining at the margins of the discourse about what is really going on.

**Postmodern geek show:** This has ever been the dilemma of the sponsored artist throughout history, but even as recently as, say, 20 years ago, most TV performers swallowed the hook without much difficulty. (Tommy Smothers is the only counterexample who springs to mind). I doubt that Johnny Carson loses any sleep over it any more, if he ever did.

But Letterman, whether he likes it or not, is, like a large part of his audience, a child of the '60s, and in spite of his grumpy nihilism, the traces of '60s anger and commitment trail after him like wisps of tear gas from Grant Park. I think that at least subconsciously Letterman understands this, just as Pekar does. Letterman's appeal to his generation resides largely, in fact, in our fascination with his curdled innocence. *Late Night* at its worst—which is also often its most riveting—is a kind of postmodern geek show, a theater of cruelty, in which Letterman brings us marginal figures like Harvey Pekar in order to laugh at them, but also to exorcise, through bitter laughter, that same iconoclastic part of our generation's divided soul.

In the end, Letterman's refusal to discuss in public his relationship with GE, and indeed his refusal to discuss his private life at all in any medium, may be taken as an admirable example of celebrity reticence. On the other hand, it also recalls Orwell's conclusion about Mark Twain, America's first great licensed jester: "Significantly, [Twain] starts his autobiography by remarking that a man's inner life is indescribable. We do not know what he would have said...but we may guess that it would have wrecked his reputation and reduced his income to reasonable proportions." □

**James Hynes**, pudgy, balding and crazed, attends the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa.

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## LIFE IN HELL

## LIFE IN HELL

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**CHILDHOOD IS HELL**  
WEE TALES FOR YOUNG SNUGGLEBUNNIES

**CHAPTER 8**  
**HOW TO BE A FEISTY 4-YEAR-OLD**

ISN'T HE CUTE? I MADE HIM THAT LITTLE SUIT MYSELF.

**PROPER REPLIES TO OFTEN-ASKED QUESTIONS**

CAN'T YOU SIT STILL?  
**NO!**  
WOULD YOU PLEASE STOP SHRIEKING?  
**NO!**  
SHALL WE PICK UP OUR TOYS NOW?  
**NO!**  
WOULD YOU LIKE A COOKIE?  
**NO I MEAN YES!**

**HOW TO WORRY MOM AND DAD NEEDLESSLY**

TWITCH AND SQUIRM  
LIE OUTRAGEOUSLY  
I SWEAR ON THE BIBLE THAT I RODE A GIANT BLUE DOGGY TO THE CANDY PLANET WHILE YOU WERE SLEEPING LAST NIGHT.  
BITE NAILS  
STEAL COOKIES  
PULL OFF SCABS  
FALL ON YOUR FACE OFTEN  
BLINK REPEATEDLY  
TALK NAUGHTY  
YOU'RE A DOO-DOO.  
TALK AND EAT  
SIMULTANEOUSLY  
SUCK THUMB  
WET PANTS  
PLAY WITH YOURSELF  
PUT SHOES ON WRONG FEET

**HOW TO EAT CAKE**

① PEEL OFF FROSTING  
② EAT FROSTING  
③ DISCARD THE REST  
④ ASK FOR MORE CAKE

**THE CLEVER WORLD OF 4-YEAR-OLD HUMOR**  
TELL RISQUE JOKES TO SHOW OFF YOUR NEWLY DEVELOPED SOPHISTICATION.

GUESS WHAT? I WENT WEE-WEE IN THE POOL!! HA HA HA HA HA!!!  
SERIOUSLY, FOLKS, NOT REALLY.

**THE PAINFUL WORLD OF VIOLENCE**  
IF YOU ARE CAUGHT HITTING A SMALLER CHILD, YOUR PARENT MAY VERY WELL GIVE YOU A QUICK SWAT WITH THIS STERN ADMONISHMENT:

NEVER HIT SOMEONE SMALLER THAN YOU!!!

**THE STRESS-FILLED WORLD OF OTHER 4-YEAR-OLDS**  
BEING AROUND SAVAGE TYKES YOUR OWN AGE IS NOT MERE CHILD'S PLAY. YOU MUST CONSTANTLY BE ON YOUR TOES WITH THESE CRAFTY LITTLE DEMONS. NEVER LET DOWN YOUR GUARD. ALWAYS HIT BACK, AND ABOVE ALL, DEFEND YOUR TOYS TO THE DEATH.

① GIVE FAIR WARNING  
② MAKE YOUR NEEDS KNOWN  
③ DEMONSTRATE SUPERIORITY  
④ NEGOTIATE PEACE.  
GO 'WAY!  
GIMME THAT TRUCK!  
I HAVE BIGGER BLOCKS AT HOME.  
STOP CALLING ME DOO-DOO OR I'LL SOAK YOU.

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By James Hynes

"shill, n.: one who poses as an innocent bystander to help a confidence man win over a prospective victim"

—Webster's Third New International Dictionary

"He had in him an iconoclastic, even revolutionary vein which he obviously wanted to follow up and yet somehow never did follow up. He might have been a destroyer of humbugs and a prophet of democracy more valuable than Whitman, because healthier and more humorous. Instead he became that dubious thing a 'public figure,' flattered by passport officials and entertained by royalty, and his career reflects the deterioration in American life...."

—George Orwell, in his essay "Mark Twain—The Licensed Jester"

IF YOU WERE WATCHING *LATE NIGHT WITH David Letterman* on the night of Aug. 31, you saw a remarkable thing, something unprecedented in at least this viewer's experience of the show: David Letterman not only lost his temper, but he lost his sense of humor. The object of Letterman's wrath was Cleveland comic-book writer Harvey Pekar, who started out his segment of the show by insinuating that Letterman had scabbed during the recent writers' strike, and then, after the commercial break, brought up his (Pekar's) previous, controversial appearance on the show.

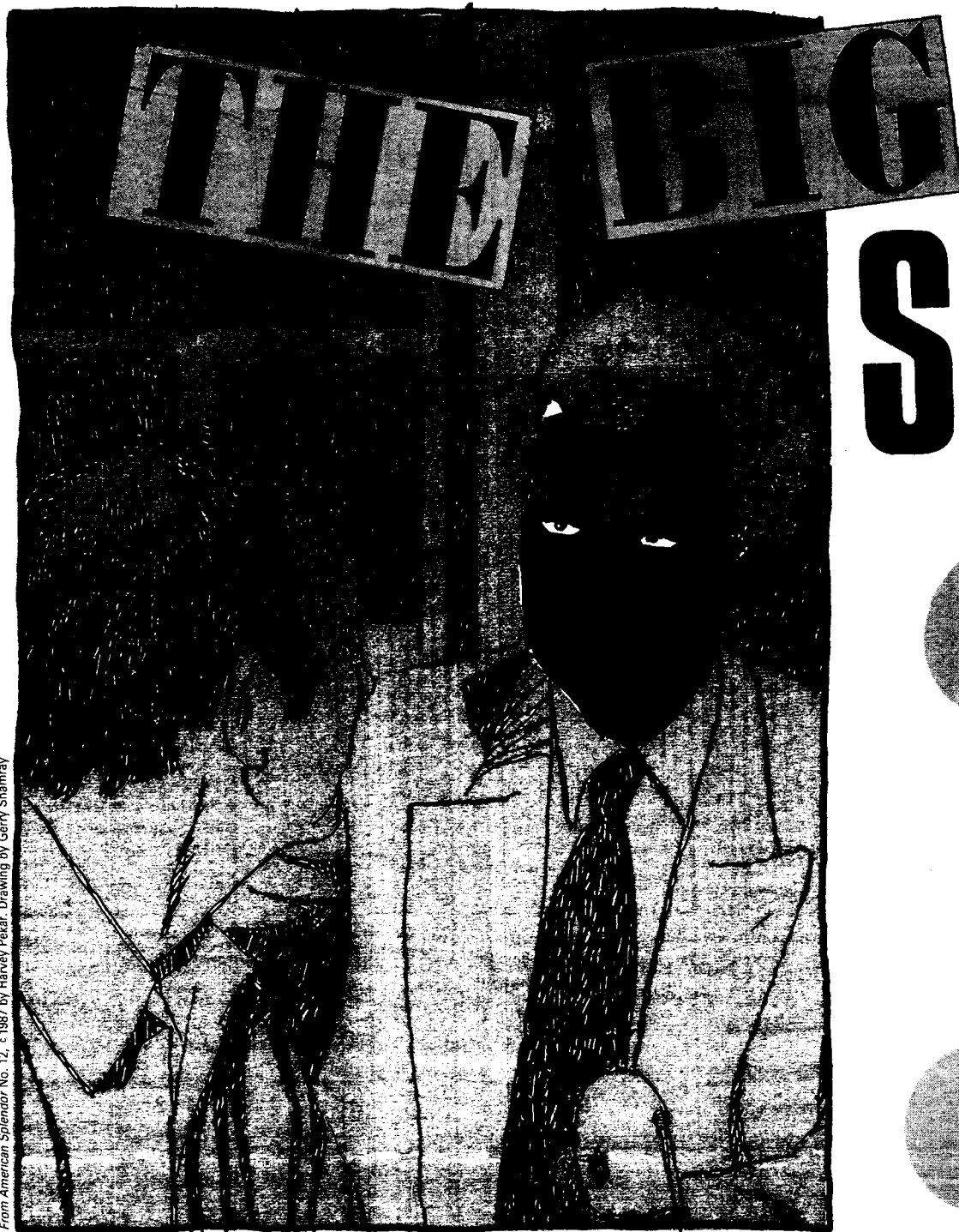
It ended with Pekar calling Letterman a shill for the General Electric Corporation, which owns NBC. It was at this point that Letterman's justifiably famous wit failed him. Leaning forward and stabbing the desk with his forefinger, Letterman declared that: (a) what Pekar said was not true (i.e., he is not a shill for GE); and (b) that this was not the place to discuss it. A shouting match ensued, in which Letterman called Pekar a dork and slagged off his comic book. Then he cut abruptly to a commercial, after which Pekar was gone.

**Stupid human tricks:** Now, even Letterman would have to admit that this was dynamite television. Indeed, up until Pekar's appearance the show had been unusually lame: the jokes were bad, Letterman was grumpy and out of sorts, the Stupid Human Tricks were more stupid and less funny than usual.

After Pekar's sudden departure Letterman tried to kill the extra time with a routine slated for the following evening, but the tension in the studio was palpable. Letterman was as rattled as I've ever seen him. He was still angry by the end of the show, and unless I miss my guess, hurt and insulted as well. In fact, Letterman's rage at Pekar was one of the most revealing moments of television I've seen in years. But in order to explain why, I have to back up a bit.

First of all, you have to consider the difference between Pekar and Letterman. While both started out as marginal cult figures, Letterman has become, whether he acknowledges it or not, a bona fide major celebrity. Pekar, meanwhile, remains, and always will be, at the fringes of American popular culture. One of the leading figures in the recent development of adult comic books, Pekar is the author of *American Splendor*, each irregularly published issue of which consists of stories based on Pekar's own experiences.

While some of the new comic book auteurs, such as Alan Moore and Frank Miller, devote themselves to deconstructing the



myth of the superhero, Pekar has turned his own working-class life (last time I saw *American Splendor* he was still a file clerk at the V.A. hospital in Cleveland) into a kind of pop existentialist myth, with himself as introspective hero. Pekar writes about everything that happens to him: fights with his boss at work, minor racial incidents in his neighborhood, conversations with his girlfriend, his private thoughts during a walk on a rainy day. **Angry and articulate:** In his relentless fascination with his own reflections to the minutiae of everyday life, Pekar is reminiscent of Charles Bukowski or Henry Miller, though without their appetite for sex and alcohol; his closest contemporary is assembly-line worker/social critic Ben Hamper. Like

**Harvey Pekar pushed it, David Letterman lost it and *Late Night* may never be the same.**

Hamper, Pekar's greatest strength is the tension between his ordinariness as a man and his extraordinary skill in chronicling it. He is thoughtful, articulate and, above all, angry, a rare and precious attribute in this age of yuppie nihilism.

As a television personality, though, Pekar is a disaster. Pudgy, balding and wild-eyed, he comes across on *Late Night* as the sort of guy you see ranting on street corners. He was originally asked to appear because one of Letterman's writers was a fan of *American Splendor*. He was asked to return, however, because on TV he comes across as, well, a dork, and an unusually colorful and loud-

mouthed dork at that.

It is a measure of Pekar's acuity, however, that unlike the other oddballs who appear on *Late Night*, he *understands* why he's there and tries to use it to his advantage. Specifically, a year ago Pekar arrived on the show with (as I recall) a file folder full of clippings about GE's role as the largest defense contractor in the nation. (Pekar wrote about that night in the *Village Voice* and the latest issue of *American Splendor*.)

When Letterman's staff found out what he wanted to talk about—namely the nuclear culpability of *Late Night*'s parent company—they tried to talk him out of it. Their position was that *Late Night* is an apolitical comedy show and not the place to discuss nuclear weapons; if you want to argue politics, they said in effect, go on *Meet the Press*.

Pekar, however, is shrewd enough to know his place in the video universe: he's a strange, angry man who has a snowball's chance in hell of ever being on *Meet the Press*, but *because* he's strange, he's perfect for Letterman. And if that is to be his only TV forum, he might as well run with it.

**Like a pit bull:** That time Letterman kept his cool and easily undercut Pekar's attempt at political education with a series of skillfully wielded wisecracks. This time, though, Pekar came out with his eye already on Letterman's jugular. If he couldn't engage Letterman on the issue of nuclear weapons, he would hit Dave where it hurt, by raising the issue of Letterman's relations with the company that owns his show. By the time he sat down next to Letterman's desk, Pekar was already out of control, and like a pit bull he clamped onto Letterman and worried him

until he drew blood. And, God bless him, he did it: Letterman lost his temper while Pekar sat there grinning.

And Letterman, God bless him, turned around and broadcast the entire exchange. Which brings us to the meat of the whole business: if he isn't a shill for GE, then why was Letterman so pissed off? Pekar obviously struck a nerve. On the other hand, if he is a shill for GE, why broadcast the exchange at all?

It is something like this question that is at the heart of Letterman's tantalizing equivocal appeal. As I wrote in these pages two years ago (*In These Times*, Feb. 26, 1986), Letterman is the quintessential video modernist: nobody—not Monty Python, not SCTV, not the video avant garde—has done more to deflate before a mass audience the hypocrisy, sentimentalism and sheer, relentless tackiness of commercial television. Letterman's contempt for trash culture seems genuine: unlike the SCTV crowd, he doesn't even secretly love the stuff he lampoons. Which can only lead you to wonder what Letterman thinks of himself. The man makes six figures a year working in a medium he sneers at; is he laughing at himself all the way to the bank?

This is why the exchange with Pekar is revealing. Letterman makes a great many jokes at the expense of GE, calling their products shoddy and their executives pinheads, but this is only the bravado of the office smartass lipping off at the water cooler. As his reaction to Pekar's attack indicates, Letterman has become, in Orwell's phrase, a licensed jester. When push comes to shove,

Continued on page 22